

THE TALE OF A HORSE



BY THE AUTHOR OF "BLAIR ATHOL"

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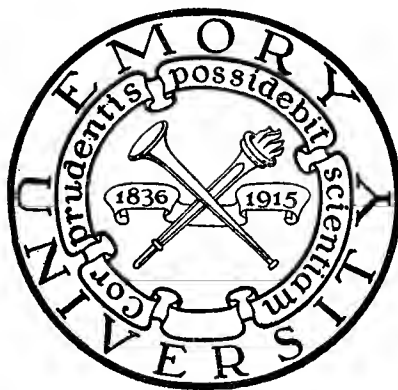
"WHO ARE THE HAPPY, WHO ARE THE FREE?
YOU TELL ME, AND I'LL TELL THEE.

Those who have tongues that never lie,
Truth on the lip, truth in the eye,
To Friend or to Foe,
To all above, and to all below;

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SO MAY IT BE WITH THEE AND ME."

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THE
TALE OF A HORSE

BY
"BLINKHOLIE"

AUTHOR OF "BLAIR ATHOL"

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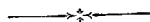
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THE TALE OF A HORSE

THE TALE OF A HORSE.



CHAPTER I.

M^Y name is Slapkins—Joseph Slapkins—and until recent lamentable events, I lived happily and in comfort as the Vicar of Kirby, in Yorkshire. Now I inhabit a three-pair-back in an obscure portion of London, and am constrained to make a living by my pen. This living, I am bound to say, is not so substantial or so pleasant as my former one. How I fell from that state to this, it shall be my endeavour to narrate.

I will premise that I was never notorious for athletic prowess or for bodily strength and endurance. When, as it sometimes happened, at school I engaged in conflicts with even much smaller boys, it was ever my lot to succumb; and I did not by any means

increase in stamina as I increased in stature. By the usual perversity of fate, the living of Kirby, to which I was appointed, contained numerous outlying villages; and to do my duty conscientiously I required almost Weston-like powers of walking. As time went on I began to feel I had undertaken a task to which I was wholly unequal, and I felt almost inclined to resign the charge for which I was eminently unfitted. Would that I had then done so, for I should at least have retired with honour!

One night, as I was sitting half dead with the toils of the day, in my particular arm-chair, my wife, dear creature, who little knew the fatal counsel she gave, spoke to me and said—

“I have been thinking, Joseph, that you must get a horse, and ride, instead of walking these dreadful distances.”

I started spasmodically.

“A horse, Mrs. Slapkins, a horse? Do you not know that the horse is a degrading animal, and very pernicious to man? Do you not know that it ensnares its wretched victims in a net of hideous crimes, and draws them on surely to destruction? Do you know——”

"My dear," replied she, "I know that the horse is what you say, but I do think that you have that strength of mind and Christian spirit, which will enable you to overcome its wiles, and possibly to reform the poor creature, and render it a respectable member of society."

I pondered some moments on what she said, and I now know that my future destiny was trembling in the balance.

"But," I urged, "I cannot ride."

She was not to be overcome by this difficulty.

"You can easily learn from the riding-master at York."

Again I pondered, and it seemed that Providence was really suggesting this means of doing my duty. What a comfort it would be to bid farewell to this dismal walking! Besides, I thought, would not the example I should set, as a man owning a horse and not suffering contamination, be productive of some good result?

So then I embraced my wife, and decided to become an equestrian. Next day I would go to the riding-master and commence a course of instruction.

I will pass cursorily over my days in the riding-

school. They were not interesting, and, in some respects, they were painful. I did not find in the evenings that I could sit down, even in my easy chair, and reflect with any degree of pleasure on the events of the day.

Manifold though the difficulties were, I overcame them in the end. It was long indeed before I could master the intricacies of the reins, and I never could prevent my trousers from ascending to my knees, until at length I was provided with straps to keep them down. By degrees I was permitted to venture outside the riding-school, and accompanied my master about the country. Presently he pronounced me fit to go alone ; and the next thing was to procure a horse.

I subsequently ascertained that certain malevolent persons, having seen me riding, began, about this time, to hint that there was more in the parson than any one gave him credit for, and that there was some talk of him having ridden in steeplechases before he came to Kirby. At any rate, he was going to take to hunting, and chance what the bishop might say.

But, to continue my story. I decided, after much deliberation, to entrust my destinies to a certain

horse-dealer, whom I had reason to consider a respectable man. His name was Peacock, and on my telling him of my requirements, he looked sagaciously at me and winked.

"Well," said he, "I've got a little 'oss here that'll just suit you; I know what you want."

Here he nudged me in the ribs, grinned, and laid a finger to his nose. I did not understand this proceeding, but concluded it was the ordinary method adopted in horse-dealing transactions; so, not to appear wanting in necessary courtesies, I also smiled and assumed a generally jocose demeanour.

"Yes," he continued, "this 'ere 'oss is as clever as cat; you can't put him down; he can stay for a week, and gallop too."

I must confess I have never been able to comprehend how any creature could stay and proceed onward at the same time; and as for the rest of the apparent encomiums passed on the horse, they conveyed little or no impression to my mind; but I feared to display ignorance, so was silent.

"Once you set him going, people will never see the way you've gone," he proceeded.

I replied that that was immaterial, for I should

never go anywhere where I was ashamed for people to see me.

"That's right," he cried, "I've heard you go desperate straight."

"It's the best way in the end," said I. I was about to have added something about the straight and narrow way; but Peacock just then went into a stable, and after some brushing and certain inexplicable operations, led forth the horse, with white face and legs. I noticed that it had a roving eye. Presently Peacock began running with the animal up and down a lane close by. The creature trotted proudly, with head and tail high in air. I could not but admire it. Then a saddle and bridle were put on, and I was invited to "throw my leg over him and try his paces." I felt hardly sufficient confidence in myself, however, to attempt such a performance just then, so I said that I should prefer to see some one else ride the horse. Peacock thereupon mounted him, and rode into a paddock adjoining, where he walked, trotted, and cantered, and finally jumped over one or two fences. This latter performance surprised me not a little, but I concluded the horse's ability in this respect could not be prejudicial to

him, though I inwardly resolved, if I ever made him mine, to give no opportunity of exercising his saltatory powers. The creature looked very beautiful as he was ridden up to me, and, with flashing eye and distended nostril reminded me of the war-horse in the Book of Job. "It cannot be," I thought, "that there is any innate evil in such an animal."

The price, one hundred pounds, seemed to me a large sum, but not large in comparison with the benefit I hoped to receive from the alleviation of my toils. So I agreed to the purchase, and added, "I have no doubt he will do my work admirably, as I only want him to carry me on visits to my parishioners."

"Of course — of course," said Peacock, "I understand."

Here he looked exceedingly sagacious over his whisky, for he and I were now sitting together in his house.

All being now arranged, I became the owner of Rakeaway, who was to be sent on to me next day, by which time my stable would be ready for his reception. Elated with my transaction, I returned home at once to announce the glad news to my wife

CHAPTER II.

'T was but a moment he restrained
That fiery barb so sternly reined ;
'T was but a moment that he stood,
Then sped as if by death pursued ;
But in that instant o'er his soul
Winters of memory seemed to roll.

—*The Gicour.*

NEXT morning Rakeaway arrived, and I was all impatience to show him to my wife and mother-in-law ; so I immediately led them into the stable-yard, where I found him in the hands of James, my groom. They were loud in their admiration of his tapering legs, beautiful eyes, and expanded nostrils, and I felt quite proud of my purchase as I witnessed the evident favour that he found.

The saddle in which he had been ridden over was still on his back, and he looked calm and complacent.

“Would it not,” I thought, “more than ever delight my female relatives if I mounted on the back of the horse, and displayed to them my equestrian skill?”

I determined to make the attempt.

I am conscious that I did not gain the saddle with that facility and elegance which the occasion might seem to demand. Still, with a convulsive effort, I did succeed at length in mounting. I knew that much would depend on the next few moments, and I trembled, as my mother-in-law put on her spectacles, at the thought of a humiliating failure.

Gently I urged the horse to move on, and to my inexpressible relief the obedient creature slowly and demurely walked forwards amid murmurs of delight from my now assembled household. Dexterously guiding him through the opened gates, I turned down the road, and ineffable emotions of delight surged up in my bosom as I felt that he readily complied with my will.

After going a short distance I turned back, and with increasing boldness gently shook the rein, and with my voice encouraged the horse to accelerate his speed. The generous animal answered to my call, and broke into a trot, carrying me at that pace past the wonder-stricken members of my family, who burst into exclamations of profound admiration. Then, as the old lines came to my mind,

“ He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dares not put it to the touch
To win or lose his all,”

I summoned my utmost resolution, and incited the steed to still greater efforts. My success was complete: the gallant creature sprang forward, and with a long sweeping motion cantered back again, amid the ecstatic applause of the spectators. The clear frosty air of November seemed delightfully fresh as I careered through it, and I felt the glow of health suffuse my cheeks.

“ Oh! ” I thought, as I rode back and dismounted, “ my Rakeaway is indeed a treasure! ”

In the afternoon two friends of mine came to call; they were father and son, and their name was Lumley. The father was, I had always understood, a great authority on horses, and the son was not deficient in that branch of knowledge. The conversation turned, of course, on my purchase, and old Lumley said he hoped they would soon see me out on him, though he was afraid there was going to be a frost. I replied that I should certainly go out on him whether there was a frost or not. At this the young man laughed,

and the old one said I was a keen hand. I said I could never feel happy staying at home just because of a frost.

"But," continued one of my friends, "if there is a frost the hounds won't come."

I knew, unhappily, too well that my congregations, to which I considered he was jocosely referring, were peculiarly sensitive to weather, and inclined to stay at home on the smallest pretext. So I said I feared that might be so, but hoped for the best. We now went into the yard to inspect Rakeaway, and I experienced the keenest pleasure in opening his stable door and showing him in all his glory.

Young Lumley at once pronounced him a good sort; and his father proceeded to critically examine the animal. Ere long, from no apparent cause, he began to violently menace the poor creature with his stick, and even beat him cruelly on the ribs; then clutched his throat, while I became quite hot with anger and apprehension. Having wellnigh strangled the horse in his vice-like grasp, and caused him to cough several times, the cruel tormentor stayed his hand just as I was driven to the verge of desperation. *Mem.*—I will be careful of Lumley in future. Doubt-

less he is angry that I have a better horse than his, and so avenges himself on the unoffending animal.

"He is quite sound," he remarked, as he walked up to his son and myself.

"Of course he is," I replied stiffly.

The son now said he would very much like to see him out; and I, who remembered well my triumphant exhibition of the morning, at once complied with the request, and added that I would myself ride him in the field, where they might have a good look at him. James having put on the saddle, I took my seat—this time with greater skill and confidence than before—and rode off followed by the two Lumleys to my grass land, which consisted of a five acres field, at the farther end of which were some allotment gardens, separated from it by a high, stiff hedge, and large ditch. There was, however, a communication between my field and these gardens in the shape of a gate and bridge over the ditch.

Once on the grass, the demeanour of Rakeaway changed in a marked manner. He no longer walked steadily along as before, but tossed his head, snorted, and moved at a pace that seemed neither a trot nor

a walk. I found it by no means easy to retain my seat on him in that careless and unconcerned manner which I had decided to assume ; but I apprehended no danger, and my friends expressed their approval, saying he looked a gay, light-hearted horse, that would do a lot of work. I determined now to essay the trot, as in the morning, and with that intent touched Rakeaway with my heels, and impelled him onwards. The result was not what I expected. The treacherous beast squealed hideously, and bounded in the air, leaped wildly forward, as if into space, thrust down his head to the earth, pulling me along with it as I clung to the reins, then threw it up again with fearful violence, striking me a crushing blow on the nose, and finally burst into a mad, merciless gallop.

I know not precisely where I had been during these evolutions. I *do* know that the greater part of my time was spent in mid-air, but the horse seemed never to lose sight of me, and caught me on some portion of his neck or back whenever I descended ; and I found myself, though sadly flustered, safe in the saddle when the wild gallop began. My presence of mind was fast forsaking me, but I pulled desperately at the reins in the hope of stop-

ping the truculent brute; but it was useless, and even then it occurred to me that it would be well to look, if possible, as if the horse was going under my will and guidance. The Lumleys surely would admire a man who dared to ride at such desperate speed. We were now nearing the end of the field, and I thought to turn and make a circuitous course.

I have many times thought of it, and I am still confident that the rein I pulled was the one calculated to direct Rakeaway in the way he should have gone, but the despicable animal felt not, or heeded not, and kept on his way. Never, even when we were close to the end of the field, and he cocked his ears, and still further quickened his pacc, did I imagine that the lunatic quadruped had reached such a height of maniacal folly as to dare the deed he then accomplished. The fence rose high and strong before my gaze—we were upon it, and instinctively I closed my eyes. There was a feeling as of flying into the abysms of eternity, and a rushing descent to the regions of earth. I opened my eyes, and I was clasping the neck of my terrible horse, safe among the allotment gardens. I was faint with emotions of horror and thankfulness, and it was some

time before I could securely regain my seat. During my efforts my malevolent steed trampled ruinously on the majority of the gardens.

"Oh, you villin," shrieked an old woman who was working in one of them, "oh, you drunken, horse-racing villin! I'll tell the bishop of yer, I will."

I was too much overcome, however, to give ear to her objurgations, and turning a shuddering glance at the mighty fence and yawning chasm over which I had but just flown, I directed Rakeaway to the road, which led through the gardens to the gate into my field.

Through the gate I now saw the two Lumleys hastening down the field, doubtless to ascertain my fate, for the hedge was so high as to obscure from their view all that had happened on the other side. Presently they saw me, and burst into strange shouts of "Bravo!" and "Yoicks!" "Tally-ho!" which they yelled forth at the top of their voices; and I became aware that they were applauding my exploit under the belief it had been intentional on my part. I was glad they had not seen me on the neck of Rakeaway after I had gone from their gaze. But as I was congratulating myself on this fortunate turn of events, I

was alarmed by the diabolical horse breaking into a trot and neighing loudly when he heard their shouts. We were approaching the gate, and I strove to stay him, but he regarded my frantic pulling at the bridle as a necessary evil that it was best not to notice.

Still I did not dream that the idiotcy of the unnatural animal could be such as to regard a gate in the light of an obstacle to be scornfully o'ertopped, instead of a friendly assistance to progression. Again was I doomed to a cruel shock. Again the ears were ominously cocked, and the pace, despite my utmost efforts, became a slow canter. Again the horrible aërial flight ; again the suicidal descent to earth ; and I looked around and found myself in my own field, by no means so much discomposed in my saddle as before.

Why it was so I cannot say, unless, as there was no ditch, Rakeaway did not in his bound traverse such an immensity of space as on the first occasion ; but one thing is certain, I had not this time been in any danger of parting from him. I felt conscious of this, as I rode up to my friends with an air of assumed *nonchalance* that I was far from feeling.

“By Jove, Slapkins,” said the younger of the two,

"you'll take the shine out of all of us, I can see; I never saw such a fellow in my life."

"I never saw a bigger jump taken in my life," added the elder.

I modestly remarked that it was a fair jump, but the horse was a good one. "He is that," said they.

"Then," continued old Lumley, "the way you popped him over that gate was worth going a hundred miles to see. Your hands are just perfection."

Amid volumes of congratulatory conversation such as this, I returned to the stable—Rakeaway being now quite placid—and thankfully dismounted. In the house it was very pleasant to hear them recount my wonderful feats to my wife and mother-in-law, who looked proudly on me. I, of course, disclaimed all idea of personal merit, and attributed all that there was to admire to the excellency of the horse. I had now become so pleased with my position, that when old Lumley offered me £200 for him I actually refused it; though in my wild terror an hour back I would have gladly given him away. Before going away they insisted on taking a tape and measuring my jump, after which they departed, saying they would see me, of course, on Saturday.

CHAPTER III.

If any person doubt it, I appeal
To history, tradition, and to facts,
To newspapers whose truth all know and feel.

—*Don Juan.*

AFTER dinner I became more than ever complacent and satisfied with my deeds of the afternoon. I verily believe I persuaded myself that I had thoroughly enjoyed the ride, and would repeat it as soon as possible. I could not refrain from stealing out of the house, and going to the stable to have just one more look at Rakeaway. The sagacious creature evidently knew me, as he turned towards me his beautiful intelligent head, and neighed a gentle welcome.

“Surely,” I thought, “it can do no harm to give him a trifle of food in my own hands. Such conduct on my part will render him grateful to me,

and will establish that complete sympathy between us which should always exist—according to the books—between the horse and his rider.”

So I opened the corn-bin, to the evident delight of Rakeaway, who clearly divined my purpose, and, taking therefrom a double handful, I walked cautiously up to him, and presented my offering. He devoured it, as I stood by, with the extremest satisfaction.

I now began to feel perfectly at home with him, for I felt sure the corn must have made him my friend; and I ventured to pat his neck, and finally stooped down and passed my hand along his legs as I had seen old Lumley do. Suddenly, upon that portion of my body which was most elevated in my then position, I felt a most agonizing nip, crush, or bite. The pain was intense, for the malicious horse had seized me in the vice-like grasp of his blood-thirsty jaws. I cried out loudly, and the teeth were removed, while I fell on my face among the straw. Starting to my feet, I perceived James, who had entered the stable, and was looking at me with a mingled expression of surprise and contempt.

His presence quite confused me, for I had a sort

of instinctive feeling I was doing wrong in feeding Rakeaway, who was now eating away as methodically as ever. I considered, however, it was necessary to say something, so remarked, in a slightly agitated tone, "James, this horse is not safe; he has attempted to devour me."

"Serve yer right, if yer 'ave no more sense," was the reply.

I was so wonder-stricken at his words, that I gazed blankly at him, and simply said nothing. Before I had time to frame a proper and dignified answer to his insolence, he continued, in disjointed fragments, as he closed and locked the corn-bin, and set things here and there to rights—

"A nice thing to have one's 'osses fed after one's stabled up and left 'em. I knows how much corn a 'oss wants as well as any man. If this 'oss gets more 'an I gives 'im he'll kiek somebody hoff, he will, not to mention gettin' fever in 'is feet from not 'avin' sufficient hexercise to carry it all hoff."

Then, just as I was about to speak, he flung out of the place, telling me to mind and shut the door after me if I wasn't "a-goin' to stop there all night." I was, of course, very indignant when I pondered

over the words of James, and the pain of the bite by no means added to my good humour, so that I fear my wife and mother-in-law did not find me a very pleasant companion that night. We went to bed early, I having inwardly resolved to dismiss James next morning. When morning came, however, my resentment had subsided, and I knew that grooms are very scarce indeed. It would never do for me to be left to manage the carnivorous Rake-away myself; and so I decided to reason with James—represent to him the enormity of his conduct, and, having reduced him to a proper degree of contrition, to overlook his offence this time.

Just as I came downstairs I was told James wished to see me, and made no doubt he had come to apologize. I therefore assumed a dignified demeanour, and went to him. To my utter amazement, he addressed me in the tone of a man on whom I had inflicted some cruel injury, and said he wished to give me notice, “as no groom as was a groom could bear to have his ’osses interfered with by hanybody, and as I evidently thought he did not know his business, I must get some one as would do it better, if I could.”

The position taken up by James thoroughly sur-

prised me, and I could not at once reason myself into the belief that such apparent distress was groundless. I felt almost persuaded that I had been guilty of some hideous crime towards an innocent fellow-creature; and actually so far debased myself as to do something very like begging his pardon, and entreating him to stay on. This, after some demur, he consented to do, on the understanding that I would never meddle with his work again. I then left him, having ordered him some beer as a further propitiation.

Upon mature consideration I could not but be aware that I had acted weakly in this matter. James, I was sure, would pursue his advantage, and would presently obtain the most complete mastery over me. Sullenly I entered the breakfast-room, and sat down to read the morning paper. Judge of my horror when, among the local intelligence, my eye fell on the following:—

“KIRBY.—A SPORTING PARSON.—Yesterday, we are informed, the Rev. Joseph Slapkins, vicar of Kirby, made a wager that he would jump a certain hedge and ditch on his horse Rakeaway. The obstacle in question is five feet in height, stiff bound,

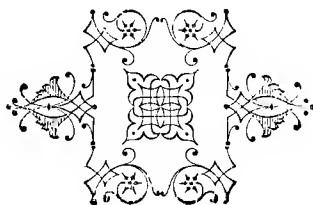
and the width of the ditch or drain on the other side is eighteen feet. It has never been cleared within the memory of man. The last, and so far as we know the only one hitherto, to attempt it was Mr. Octavius Smithkinson, on his well-known grey hunter. Upon that occasion Mr. Smithkinson added an overcoat of mud to his garments but just arrived from Hill Brothers, while the colour of his horse was no longer conspicuous among the rest. Briefly, Mr. Smithkinson came to grief. Much excitement was caused in the neighbourhood by the vicar's wager, said to be twelve dozen of champagne, and at the appointed time many persons were assembled to witness what all expected would be a failure. Mr. Slapkins was not long before he appeared, mounted upon his horse, a flash-looking chestnut. Without any further preliminaries the reverend gentleman cantered smartly down the field, and about twenty yards from the fence caught hold of Rakeaway's head, and sent him at it in the most determined and business-like manner. The horse performed the feat with apparent ease, as he landed with fully a yard to spare in the allotment gardens at the other side. Mr. Slapkins then quietly returned, not deigning to

open the high five-barred gate, but putting his horse neatly over it like a thorough workman. He was loudly cheered as he rode back to the stable, and, indeed, seems to be one of the good old sort, now so nearly extinct."

It is impossible to describe my horror on reading this atrocious fabrication. Visions of a wrathful archbishop rose before me, and of the just detestation of all my virtuous brethren. I to have been guilty of a wager! Infamous! Champagne too, the most immoral of liquors! The Lumleys had never perpetrated such a crime, I felt assured. They never corresponded with papers. No, I have it: it was that outrageous young scoundrel from Kilvington, who but the other day assaulted the haughty baronet of Newburgh with his scurrilous writings. He is even now staying with the Lumleys, and he has done this.

Thus flashed the thoughts through my tumultuous brain; but one thing seemed certain: instant explanations must be made to the archbishop, and the paper must be written to. I would hasten to York and see the incensed prelate in person, and for that purpose I must ride Rakeaway. He would be quiet

on the road, I had no doubt. Of course, it was the springy turf that had exhilarated him on the previous afternoon. So, then, in haste I sent to tell James to put the saddle on the horse.



CHAPTER IV.

“And hark, and hark, the deep-mouthed *bark*.”
—*The Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

OVERCOME by my emotions of shame, horror, and apprehension as to the probable result of the newspaper paragraph mentioned in my last, I mounted Rakeaway almost instinctively, forgetful of his evil ways. Hastily I rode off in the direction of York, and the horse seemed calm and perfectly obedient. It was a rather unpleasant day, and the clouds were gathering overhead, but I only thought of reaching my destination and appeasing the archbishop. Rakeaway trotted gaily along, and did not seem like the same animal I had ridden on the previous day.

Suddenly, as I proceeded on my way, rapt in conflicting thoughts, there came upon my ear a sound as of distant barking dogs. My horse heard it too, for he stopped without warning, in the rudest manner,

causing me to sway uneasily forward in my saddle, while he cocked his ears and listened with evident eagerness.

Nearer and nearer the barking came, and now I could distinguish it faintly intermixed with the cries of men. "Surely," I thought, "I am about to see some strange catastrophe."

Rakeaway's excitement increased; he pawed the ground and fidgeted restlessly to and fro, tossing his head till I became dotted with foam and flecks; and still the strange barking came on, with increasing volume.

A small red beast at this moment crossed the road in front of me, paused for a moment, listened, and then pursued its course over the next field. A few seconds' reflection convinced me that it was a fox, such as I had seen in pictures, and in the "happy families" at fairs, where animals, naturally hostile, are exhibited living together in Christian unity. Then, as again a burst of barks came floating on the breeze, it flashed across me that I was actually about to witness the atrocious barbarities of a fox chase or hunt. Yes, it was indeed so: there came the dogs, streaming away down the slope of the

adjacent hill, mad for the blood of their victim. There, too, came men wildly, madly carried by their frenzied horses over bush, brake, and briar, not otherwise than the terrible Rakeaway had carried me in that dread hour which I now remember with shuddering. Some of these were arrayed in vermilion coats, and even the very bandsmen were carrying their trumpets to the fore, all blindly and suicidally devoted to that demoniac gallop. Was it that their horses were like Rakeaway, and carried their riders thus, whether they would or no? and was this the true secret of the fearful influence the equine race holds over mankind? This was the question I then asked myself, but was unable to answer.

Yet there were some I noticed whose steeds did not seem possessed with such a pernicious spirit, for they diverged hither and thither, on their way to gates and gaps in the hedges; while, failing these, they were able so far to restrain their horses as to wheel round and return by the way that they had come, or at least to wait till some of the more desperate had broken them a path through the opposing obstacle. "Happy," I thought, "are the men whose horses are thus amenable to reason!"

On, on came the dogs, and almost I thought it was an imposing sight, but instantly recalled myself to the real iniquity of the proceeding.

Now I could recognize some of the men. There was Colonel Rarewax, whom I knew to be the master of these revels. He seemed to be the first of all, and yet not to be making his way so madly as some others, but to preserve a certain amount of calm and quietude, even at that dread moment.

There, too, was Mr. Smithkinson, who surpassed all in the horrible rashness of his horsemanship. Then, again, I saw the Lumleys, of whom the old one seemed to have even less caution than his son. "Surely," I thought, "it is monstrous for age thus to outdo the follies of youth." Labouring on behind these came Joseph Rawlinson Battersby, mounted on a strange beast that possessed no mane, but resembled, in a great degree, the gingerbread steeds exposed for sale in our village shop. This animal did not seem to be endowed with the frantic and fiery spirit of the rest, and yet it also surmounted the opposing obstacles with apparent security. And now I noticed Baron Angram, riding with a select discrimination that might have put the rest to shame.

But as I looked on this strange and—I am ashamed to say—at the moment, interesting spectacle, the dogs dashed across the road with their ear-splitting howls, and I was recalled to a sense of my position by the conduct of my horse. He leaped, bounded, and caracolled, causing me to lose my spectacles, my presence of mind, and very nearly my seat ; then, as a cavalcade of horsemen careered past me on the road, the self-willed brute became quite unmanageable, rushed violently off the highway through a gap into the fields, and pursued the dogs at such a speed that it might be thought his very life depended on the capture of them.

My hat flew off and hung by the guard ; the tails of my superfine clerical coat floated in the breeze ; I saw nothing but a maze of awful country before me, and I became half stupefied with terror as the relentless Rakeaway strode on. The whole appeared like some terrible unreality, some too dreadful nightmare. I seem now to have some faint recollection that ever and anon I heard the voice of Colonel Rarewax, violently chiding some one—his horse, I conclude—but my ideas just then were whirling in a tumult of alarm. Before I saw it, almost, we were upon a hedge,

and over it flew my inexorable steed, bounding with fearful velocity far into the next enclosure. Shot from my saddle by the power of his spring, I yet stayed my further progress by clasping his mane and ears. Thus on his neck I lay, and here, in justice to the creature, I must say he performed an intelligent act, for he tossed up his head and threw me back, safe and comparatively thankful, into my vacant saddle.

“Forrard!” yelled a man behind me—“Forrard!”

This I hardly noticed at the time, but subsequent reflections led me to perceive that he was sarcastically alluding to the forward position I had just occupied on my horse’s neck. I took occasion accordingly to tell him that I considered his remarks ungentlemanly and uncalled-for.

Now, having somewhat regained my seat, I strove with all my strength to check my maddened courser’s career, but it was useless—he heeded me not; and as I saw another hedge drawing near, I decided that I must concentrate my whole energies on retaining my position upon the horse’s back.

The saddle, I felt sure, was, at the present juncture, my only friend, and I hoped by firm adherence to render my attachment to it reciprocal. Nevertheless,

as with superfluous vigour my equine tormentor whirled me into the next field, I almost feared the dear saddle had gone from me for ever. But it was not so ; I descended upon the fore part of it, and slipped faintly back into my pristine seat. Onward we swept, and, though powerless to restrain the horse, I began to feel more at my ease. Each succeeding fence saw me less near destruction than the last, and, while racing away over a large pasture, I even ventured to look back. There still I saw Colonel Rarewax with the same placidity pursuing his wild way ; and there was Mr. Smithkinson, who, even while I was looking, fell headlong, horse and all, into a deep ditch. The Lumleys were still in sight, and others, too, there were whom I had not before noticed. Lord Fauconberg had been borne well to the front by a beautiful chestnut creature, constructed, I should say, on the most perfect lines of symmetry. He it is who—from what I read in the newspapers—is a mighty hunter, and staunch preserver of foxes. I can scarcely understand the meaning of the latter remark. Wide of him on the whip hand rides Joseph Rawlinson Battersby, with a cynical smile upon his countenance ; while close at the heels of Lord Fauconberg come Lord “ See ’em ” and Mr. Gerald,

both going well. Baron Angram I no longer observed. And still we urge along our wild career—myself the foremost of them all.

The excitement of the time, and the dangers incurred, quite precluded any reflections on the enormity of my conduct, as a clergyman, hunting a fox; I thought but of the present, and that was quite as much as my mind was competent to grasp.

I now observed with satisfaction that the rancorous dogs were leaving even Rakeaway far behind them, and I trusted he would soon abandon the pursuit as useless. Just then, as he leaped an imposing fence, a totally unnecessary sheep-dog rushed upon him from behind some stacks, barking and open-mouthed. The horse, in alarm, turned sharply round and galloped speedily away alongside the fence he had but just surmounted. Meanwhile I was clinging by one of my spurs, which fortunately had become entangled in his flank. How I recovered my seat I know not. Certain it is that I must be possessed of far greater muscular power than I imagined, for nothing short of a prodigious effort could have reinstated me. However that may be, I was on the horse's back as he bounded over a lofty gate, at which time the fore-

most chasers were just alighting over the fence where the dog had attacked me.

I was thus proceeding at right angles with the line in which the herd of dogs had but now disappeared, and yet I was astonished to observe that almost all the horsemen turned and pursued me instead of the vanished barkers. "At least," I thought, "I have now escaped from this awful situation, and the brutal quadruped will soon stop." But, as I was thus inwardly congratulating myself, again there broke upon my ears the "yap, yap, yapping," that I had fondly hoped was gone for ever, and Rakeaway amended his slackened pace. Through a high thorny fence he rushed, and there—yes, there were the pestilential dogs who had "fetched a compass," and so re-crossed my path. The lofty fence aforesaid had retained my hat and the skirt of my new garments; it had also inflicted sanguinary wounds upon my face, and I was again engaged in the pursuit.

Now I began to feel within myself that even in this phase of my career I might pursue a high and Christian motive, and such a motive must be to save the wretched animal that was thus being hounded to death by an immense body of inimical dogs. Yes, I was deter-

mined to preserve the fox from destruction, even though I perished in the attempt.

Animated by this resolve, I began even to feel pleasure in the way Rakeaway carried me, and intense anxiety came upon me to keep close enough to the murderous crew to prevent their fell designs. We were speeding away over some grass land, and I observed a line of willows in the midst of it. Then I saw a belt of shining water, and the dogs were swimming through it. A fierce feeling of resolve took hold on me as I approached the stream. I felt no fear now, and even urged my indomitable horse on, as with concentrated energy he rushed at it. There was a flight greater than all its predecessors, and I found myself rolling on the ground on the other side, while, as I sprang to my feet, Rakeaway was just dragging his hind legs up the bank. He had fallen short in his effort, but he was safe and we were over.

Without an instant's thought I scrambled on to his back, for the dogs had gained greatly on me, and I trembled for the poor fox. Not such was now the demeanour of my horse as when he had started on this furious chase. He seemed humble and submissive. I feel sure I could have stopped him had I

wished ; but, true to my Christian aim —salvation of the fox—I urged him on.

Turning in my saddle once more, I was surprised at the conduct of those who were still pursuing the quarry. Some there were who came up to the brook or river, and then retiring to a distance, rode furiously back again towards it, waving their legs and shaking their arms.

But I noticed these men displayed less energy the nearer they drew to the obstacle, and finally always stopped on the bank, or diverted their horses and rode away parallel with it. One or two appeared to slip into the water, but none got over so long as I watched. The conduct of these men seemed to me passing strange. But I had little time to think of them. Rakeaway was going slower and slower, and I fiercely incited him to proceed. The ploughed land over which we were now going seemed to retard him, and the dogs had just gone through the fence some two hundred yards in front.

And now he landed, with what seemed a sigh of relief, in an extensive pasture. I cast forward my eager glances, and there were the bloodhounds, with the poor bedrabbled fox but twenty yards before their

murderous jaws. "On, on, good horse!" I cried, "we will save him yet. Heavens! they are upon him! He is down among their mangling fangs! Fly, fly! we may not yet be too late!"

With a gallant effort the everlasting Rakeaway rushed with increased speed up to the assassinating crew, and stopped. I myself had neglected to restrain the momentum of my body, and was propelled over his head into the midst of the voracious monsters. Even then I did not forget my resolve, but clutched the poor victim, who was within my grasp, and tore him from the bloodthirsty brutes. Now I was on my feet, while high above my head I held the fox. "Saved," I cried, "saved! Avaunt, ye destroyers, avaunt!" Round me they gathered, leaping up, barking and ominous. One of them has seized me by the nether garments, and torn a strip away the whole length of the leg. I begin to feel that I shall indeed perish in my attempt. I shall be a martyr to my resolve.

Just as hope was gone there came a terrific cry of "Whoop!" while others and others swelled the wild chorus. The dogs were beaten back, and I beheld the men who had followed in the chase sur-

rounding me. Colonel Rarewax took from my now powerless hands the fox.

“Deal gently with him,” I implored.

He paid no attention, but turned away, and for a while he and one of his men seemed busied with the poor creature.

Suddenly he turned round and held up—oh, horror!—not a reanimated fox, but a ghastly, hideous, headless corse. He had split up the miserable creature with a knife, removing its feet, head, and tail. Inhumanity must reign supreme in that man’s breast. But as I gazed, fascinated with abhorrence, he drew forth the little trumpet from his saddle-bow and blew it, whereat the cruel dogs came round with eager howls. Then he shouted to them—strange weird shouts, till their excitement became intolerable, and then—oh, that I should have to record the sickening spectacle!—he threw the ghastly trunk to them, and they ate it; ay, the carnivorous reptiles absolutely made of it their loathsome meal!



CHAPTER V.

“Nunc Lape, nunc posito mensæ nituere Lyæo.”

—*Ovid F.* v. 521.

WHILE I stood, horror-stricken and faint at the ghastly spectacle detailed in the last chapter, the men gathered round me, and were loud in their expressions of gratulation. It would seem I had performed some exploit that was, in their eyes, meritorious, and I accepted the situation resignedly. Some praised the judgment with which I had ridden so as to “nick in” again with the hounds, as they said, when we all seemed hopelessly out of it. Some declared I had “hung the whole field” at the water-jump, and they had all been obliged to go round by a bridge. Every one praised my horse, and altogether I began to feel that my position was not so terrible as it had seemed. Nevertheless, when some one attached the tail of the fox to my saddle-bow I could not repress a shudder of disgust, though I

was far too weak as yet to offer any expostulation. One of the trumpeters carried away the rest of the gory remains.

Mr. Smithkinson, who had been extricated, as I was glad to see, from the ditch, now joined the party, and kindly offered me his flask, which was at that time exceedingly welcome. I felt much restored, and even capable of remounting my now placid steed. The question was, Where was I? I inquired, and was told by a Mr. Skipkinson, who formed one of the number of horsemen, that we were within two miles of York.

My first idea was to proceed on my original journey to see the archbishop ; but then I perceived the state of my garments, and found that I could never present myself before him in such a guise. My next thought was of home, but I was fully fourteen miles away from it, and I was much exhausted. The afternoon was now getting on, and Mr. Lumley the younger approached and urged me not to think of going off straight to Kirby, but to come to York and form one of a party that were going to dine at the North-Eastern Hotel. This proposal I gratefully accepted, for I really doubted my capacity to

hold out very much longer. They promised to supply me with vestments of some kind to replace the few poor shreds that yet hung about my battered body; and so—I thought—I should be able, when refreshed, to make my way home comfortably at a sufficiently early hour.

So then we turned towards York, and rode quietly off. There were some seven or eight among the lot with whom I was to dine. They included Messrs. Skipkinson, Smithkinson, Lumley, and De Rawcliffe; also Captain Ling, Lord Fauconberg, and Joseph Rawlinson Battersby, with some others whom I did not know.

We conversed pleasantly as we rode along, and soon reached the ancient city of York, where Mr. Skipkinson kindly placed a loose box at the disposal of Rakeaway, and directed his grooms to look well to that redoubtable animal. I felt, in a measure, safe by this time, and in a certain sense gratified, I grieve to say, with my exploits; for my companions evidently looked upon me in the light of a hero.

Hero or not, I could scarcely repress groans of anguish as I walked along the streets to the hotel. I began rapidly to feel as though I had been most

fearfully beaten, not to mention flayed or scarified; but I managed to preserve a stoical cast of countenance, like the Indian at the torture stake.

At the hotel it seemed Captain Ling was the only one who had any spare garments, and he could only furnish me with a scarlet coat and white flannel trousers. Nevertheless, this was better than nothing, for my garb was such that the little boys had pursued me with jeers and hoots through the streets; while I heard some one remark that I was doubtless an escaped "welsher"—alluding, I presume, to the indigent state of the population in Wales.

So I donned the proffered clothes, and presented a very strange and unclerical appearance, but I was now becoming reckless. Lumley advised me to drink a brandy and soda, which I did; and then, sitting down in an easy chair to wait for dinner, I very shortly fell asleep.

How long I slept I know not, but I was aroused by a waiter, who told me dinner was ready; and with racking pains torturing my whole body, I arose, and with difficulty made my way to the requisite room.

There everything was done in the excellent style

for which the North-Eastern Hotel is well known, and as the genial Heidsieck extended its influence through my frame, I began to feel quite happy, and even comfortable. We were a very pleasant party, and the most complete good fellowship seemed to reign over all.

Many were the statements made of the day's doings, and I noticed every one had some excellent excuse for not having accomplished the water-jump; but there was unanimous appreciation of my sportsmanlike ardour in joining the chase when I was not equipped for it, and was not designing anything of the kind. They wished all parsons were like me, they said, and then the churches would be much better filled. Altogether, I could not but feel flattered and complacent at their conversation, while assiduous waiters ever and anon replenished my glass, and I drank heedlessly and without a thought. Dinner was over, and fast the wine went round; but I was rapt in attention to my companions, and dreamed not of the dangerous liquid I was mechanically imbibing.

I do not, at the present moment, so well recollect the subsequent affairs of the evening; but I know speeches were made in honour of fox-hunting, and I

know Joseph Rawlinson Battersby proposed the health of Lord Fauconberg in laudatory terms; to which Lord Fauconberg briefly replied with a passing reflection on the excellent qualities of Battersby.

He was then called upon for a song, which, as it was written down, I am able to give *in extenso*.

Though the learned men may scorn,
Though the college dons may sneer,
The horse, the hound, and horn
To my heart were ever dear.
Gladness and health are found,
And ecstasy, I say,
All in the magic sound—
“Away—gone away!”

There's a freshness in the fields,
There's a sweetness in the air,
And the noble Reynard yields
Sport that is beyond compare;
When, as best we can, we follow
On a glorious scenting day,
Riding forward to the “halloo”—
“Away—gone away!”

A health, then, to the fox,
And all who keep him well;
Put poisoners in the stocks,
Or send them straight to h—l.
At least we'll hope to hear,
Ere long, that such as they
Have left the country clear--
“Away—gone away!”

I shall never forget the rich, manly tones in which Lord Fauconberg trolled forth the above song. It is needless to say that he sat down amid deafening applause. It seems to strike now upon my recollection, that Mr. Battersby proposed my health in the most eulogistic terms, and that I responded; but what I said has escaped my memory. I next remember that cards were produced, and I found myself playing at a game styled "loo,"—actually for money! The whole thing seems now like some strange and impossible dream. Fortune I know favoured me, and the more I played, the more I won—I, a clergyman, who naturally regarded all such deeds with abhorrence!

It is horrible to think of it now. And still, unthinkingly, I drank, while the hours of night passed one by one.



CHAPTER VI.

“ Man, being reasonable, must get drunk.”

—*Don Juan.*

THUS, as before stated, I drank and played, at times reflecting within myself how it could be that these two actions have ever among mankind been more widely separated when they are most intimately associated together. You drink deep, and you play high. The deeper you drink, the higher you play. While some such thoughts as these coursed one another through my turbid brain, the clock struck two, and I remembered my wife. Never since our marriage had I been out after 10.30, and I half trembled at the idea of meeting her ; but I decided to go at once, and rose to ring the bell to order my horse. Directing my steps toward the required place, I was surprised to find that the room appeared to revolve, so that I reached quite a different portion of

the wall from what I intended. From thence, however, I succeeded in making a descent on the wished-for bell-rope and pulling it violently.

There was much outcry among my companions when they ascertained my intention to depart. Probably they wished to win back the money I had drawn from them. Some begged me to remain, while others jeered at me for being afraid of my wife.

Then there took hold on me the same spirit that induced Simon Peter to his three denials, and I—actually I!—cried out,

“Who says I’m frightened of my wife? I don’t care twopence for her. Gentlemen, I say, d—n my wife!”

There was, I know, loud laughter at this sally from those who remained in the room—some few had gone out—and even then I felt a little ashamed of what I had said. It now seems to me inconceivable that I should ever have uttered such words, but they are impressed on my memory, and are ever goading me to remorse.

I have preserved no minutes in my recollection of what passed until some one came in and said my horse was ready. I had a parting brandy and soda

for good fellowship, and then made my way downstairs with Mr. Smithkinson, who had apparently taken a great fancy to me, and locked his arm in mine. I fancy that the stairs at the North-Eastern Hotel are not so easy and convenient as some that I have been on. I next became mounted on Rakeaway, though I forget exactly how, and threw a sovereign to the man who stood at his head. "Let him go!" cried a voice; as the horse strove impatiently to proceed. The man loosed his hold, there was the crack of a whip behind, and away we went towards the old bridge.

Easily I expected to pull him in on the road now, tired as he was. I drew in the rein, and a shudder of ghastly foreboding crept over me as I encountered no resistance. Was I mounted on a headless phantom of the night? I knew not.

Then there came the flashes of lights in the street, and lurid gleams shot before my eyes, while the animal I bestrode thundered furiously along the stone pavement faster and faster. And still I drew in the unresisting reins till I felt the cold iron of the bit in my own hands, and the horse's head was not.

Confusion filled my mind, and a darkling cloud of

obscurity mounted up to my brain. I knew not, I felt not ; my head swam, and I clung wildly to the mane of the beast. Clattering of hoofs, shrieking, shouting, seemed massed together into one inexplicable uproar. I seemed to see a line of human beings before me. My horse was stayed. I was torn roughly from the saddle.

“ Who are you ? What’s your name ? ” said a voice of the night ; but my mind was distraught.

I was unconscious of my own being, of my own identity ; and could merely gasp, “ The archbishop, the archbishop ! ” as the thought of the prelate’s wrath flashed through me. The voice then appeared to say something about what I said being used against me at my trial, and then I knew no more. I fainted with my conflicting emotions.

I will pass hurriedly o’er the final scene. I awoke to find myself in durance vile, racked with splitting pains. I was subjected to the ignominy of examination before a magistrate, and subsequent trial. I was proved to have been drunk and disorderly ; riding, in a red coat and white trousers, furiously through the town of York, to the manifest danger of the inhabitants, and audaciously declaring myself to be

the archbishop. I was severely reprimanded, told I was a disgrace to my cloth, and fined.

There was the meeting with my wife—the unutterable agony of shame, and the undeserved forgiveness from that best of women. There was the letter from the archbishop referring to my wager, my hunting, and my last most terrible escapade. He exhorted me to endeavour to lead a new life; mentioned the evils that accrue to all who touch horseflesh; and finally concluded with his stern yet necessary decree that I should be suspended from my living of Kirby.

Thus did Rakeaway bring me to my doom, though, in justice to him, I must say that our final feat was due, not to his innate devilry, but to certain of the terrible beings I had spent the evening with. I found out afterwards that some of them had taken the bit out of his mouth before we started, and then when the lash of a whip sent him off into the night, the poor animal lost his presence of mind through not feeling the well-known hand. It was long before I could feel kindly disposed towards those who had done this; but I am a Christian, and I forgive them.

And now, as I sit in my three-pair back, and

struggle with aching heart to interest the reader of my written thoughts, I cannot refrain from warning all who are drawn towards the equine race to shun them as a pestilence. I must entreat those who possess horses to discard them ere it be too late, and the fell destroyer has dragged them on to destruction. And I will dare to pray those who have remained in strict integrity and abhorrence of the horse to yet feel pity for their weak, erring brethren, and to drop a tear of commiseration on my blighted hopes.

Now, as I write, and for a moment pause to think, I rise to stretch my weary limbs and walk to the window. In the street there is a hansom, and a chestnut horse with white legs. I would know him among a thousand—it is Rakeaway! Downstairs I rushed, out from the door, and to the horse's head. Yes, it was he ; and—it may be from general habit—he gave me a slight whinny of apparent recognition. I was weak and worn with trouble, so that the unwonted tears rose in my eyes at this kindly reception from the poor dumb brute ; and as I patted his neck, now no longer glossy, I sought in my pocket for half a crown—one of the very few remaining—and

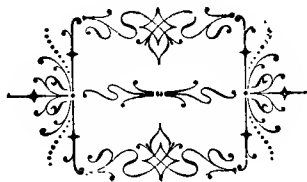
begged the driver to give the horse an extra feed or two of corn, "For," said I, "he is an old friend of mine, and I should like him to feel merry and light-hearted again, just for the sake of old acquaintance and the days that are no more."

The man had an honest face, and I feel sure he would do as I asked. He drove on, and I slowly and musingly returned to my little room.

I had never thought it till then, but it came home to me at last—the knowledge of my own heart, the feeling of love for sport. Borne down by straightlaced prejudices, I had been schooled into a state of torpid rectitude, and had not had time to emerge from it before the fatal catastrophe came; but now, as my pent-up feelings break loose, and my memory runs wantonly back on the wild free adventures of my riding days, I fancy I can again hear the hounds, that I can again feel the ecstatic pleasure of clearing the brook, that I can see the men and all the lovely country—here in this smoky town. The perils, the hurts, the fears seem as nothing now—toned down by the dim distance; and to myself I say, "Though I have paid dearly for it, that one gallop across country on Rakeaway was worth all the price."

Then, as my wife looks sorrowfully up on hearing my words, I add, "No, dear, I am wrong in that, for have I not brought disgrace and discredit upon you?"

"Ah, Joseph," she replies, "it may be so, but even I cannot help a feeling of half-regret and love for poor Rakeaway."



THE SPORT OF SHOOTING

THE SPORT OF SHOOTING;

OR,

THE GLORIOUS GUN AND THE PERILOUS
PARSON.



CHAPTER I.

“ Here we are again!”

--Ancient Ballad.

I MUST tell you, to begin with, that I, Joseph Slapkins, Clerk in Holy Orders, had begun with shame to take the lowest room—to wit, I had been suspended from my living at Kirby, in Yorkshire, and compelled to eke out a penurious life in a remote three-pair back in London. The cause of this was, as I must explain, the outrageous and unfortunate excess into which I had unwillingly been led by my possession of the horse Rakeaway. I had been carried a-hunting perforce; I had, from sheer exhaustion, accepted an invitation to dine at York; I had con-

sumed drink heedlessly; and then, clad in scarlet coat and white trousers, been placed on my steed by the wicked roysterers with whom I was consorting, and driven off into the night, the bit having previously been removed from the horse's mouth. The consequences were the police-court, and utter ruin.

Still further you should know that I found Rake-away in the streets of London in a cab. I was moved with strange emotions; and, looking back to my adventures with him, I became sensible that in my heart I had enjoyed the sport, and was conscious of a spirit that had till then lain dormant within me. And luckily for me my kind friend and benefactor, as I may now call him, the Earl of Neversham, heard my story, and was grieved to hear how grievously I had been afflicted for my somewhat involuntary sins. He made intercession with the archbishop for me—effectually, I am glad to say—and presented me to the living of Norton, where I have a comfortable £600 a year, and little work; and, moreover, my noble patron said to me he hoped I would not give up my sporting proclivities because of the past experience, as he knew well that I should be a better and a happier man with a little innocent recreation.

No one can tell my joy and thankfulness—not so much for myself as for my dear wife, who had begun to suffer much from our hard life. All this was past now, and I addressed myself to the task of showing I was worthy of the kindness bestowed on me. This was now two years ago.

I was from the first anxious to please Lord Never-sham by going in for a little sport, not to mention my own hankering that way; but my breast was too sore on the subject of horses to choose equine enjoyment as my pastime. My wife and I were walking through the village on a pleasant April evening. Hard by, in a field attached to the public house, divers of the male population were engaged shooting at a mark—a brass or copper kettle being, as I afterwards ascertained, the reward of the most expert.

“Joseph,” said my wife, as we sauntered on, “why don’t you shoot?”

“A very good idea—but I don’t know how; and I haven’t anything to shoot at. Besides, I’ve not got a gun.”

“Oh, I’m sure John Batty, the butcher, will lend you his, and show you what to do; then, when you know how to shoot, you must buy a gun.”

“Well, darling, I really think I will see Batty to-morrow about it. He is, I am told, a most skilful marksman, and there can be no harm in a gun, can there, my dear?”

“No, Joseph, of course not. Indeed, I heard Mr. Edwin Slay, of York, himself state, the other night, that he had fired away during a whole day without harming a living thing.”

“Really, I am quite rejoiced at the prospect; and I am sure Lord Neversham will be pleased to know I am taking to this method of sporting. When I am perfected in the art, he will doubtless invite me to take part with him in shooting competitions.”

“Yes, that will be very nice, Joseph; for you will meet all the best people.”

So, with glad hearts, my wife and I returned to our pretty little vicarage, and passed the happy evening in discussing this new topic till the late hours drew on, and we retired—I to dream that, now proficient in the gunner’s art, I had defeated the Prince of Wales in a match for a brass kettle at Bunkum Park, which was the name of Lord Neversham’s seat.

In the morning I arose early, and went across to see the butcher Batty.

“Good morning, John,” said I; “I have come to ask if you will kindly give me instructions in the science of shooting. I am told that you are well skilled that way, and I am anxious to learn.”

“Why, now, sir,” replied John, “it’s enough to make one conceited about one’s shooting to have the likes of you coming to learn of me. However, there’s the old gun” (pointing to a weapon hanging on his kitchen ceiling), “and a rare killer she is—you’ve only got to hold her straight.”

The gun was a muzzle-loader, and apparently ancient. I speak now from the experience I have since gained, for at that time I had little understanding of such things.

From viewing the weapon and the somewhat Hebraic countenance of the butcher, I turned to greet his wife, who had just come in. She was a stout dame, and, it was reported, had once been matched for a wager to weigh more than two women of moderate dimensions. I am not interested in matters of that class, but I have a sort of recollection that Mrs. Batty weighed up the other two women and sixteen pounds besides.

She now saluted me with unctuous good wishes,

and hopes that my wife was well. John, however, had quite taken to the idea of having me as a pupil, and had already brought down the fowling-piece, and furbished it up, fresh as it was from its triumphs of the previous night, when more than one kettle had been acquired by its means.

It might hardly interest if I told of my course of instruction. Suffice it I *was* instructed. I managed to load the instrument safely and efficaciously, though it was long before I could clip off the shot so as to make the charge accurate.

Such trifling matters as loading the same barrel twice; pulling the left-hand trigger when I wanted to let down the right hammer, and thereby discharging the left barrel close past Batty's head; firing away my ramrod; as attempting to fire with the gun at half-cock; such matters, I say, merit only a passing comment.

All this while I was shooting, or essaying to shoot, at a mark affixed to a wall in Batty's close, or "garth," as it was termed, at the back of his house.

Now, it was long before I could so far master my feelings as to fire the gun boldly and intentionally. My eyes *would* shut, and my face avert itself from the

dread explosion. Consequently I did not strike the paper at which I purported to aim so accurately as was desirable.

Still, after a whole morning so spent, amid the wonder of certain gaping yokels, whom the noise had attracted, I became tolerably capable of directing my aim, and so doing execution upon the given object.

Batty encouraged me the while, and at last he said he would not be satisfied until I killed something, and therefore desired me to fire at a sparrow sitting in the hedge which apportioned off the garden of his next-door neighbour. Unthinking for the moment of the innocence of the bird, I levelled my piece, pulled trigger, and the victim fell. My momentary triumph was dispelled by a wild shriek, and I saw a form spring, with hands upstretched, into the air, then fall, and all was still.

The form was in the garden on the other side of the fence. The thought flashed across me that I had slain a man.

Throwing down my gun—the other barrel of which thereupon went off and lodged its leaden messengers in the flank of a pig that was grunting lazily around—I rushed forward, leaped or fell over the fence, and

found Amos Batty, the butcher's son, to all appearance at the point of death. The bewildered father, who never dreamed of his first-born thus kindly condescending to assist a neighbour in horticultural toil, wrung his hands at the sight as he gazed over the hedge, and bellowed forth, "Oh! he's shot our Amos—our Amos is shot, he's shot!" Mrs. Batty and her daughters came swiftly hurrying to the place, and many others besides, but there was only one universal wailing shriek, culminating in the refrain, "Amos is shot!"—save where some ran for brandy, but in their agitation drank it themselves.

Horror-stricken though I was, I became calm, owing to the emergencies of the occasion, and attempted to raise the fallen youth. He moaned audibly.

Encouraged by this, I said, "Come, Amos, get up," and to my surprise he arose, protesting at the same time he was done for. Amid much solicitude he was taken to his home, and the doctor soon arrived, when it was found that little harm was done. The fact was that, clad in strong corduroy breeches, he had been stooping down to sow seeds—his back turned towards the fence—and my discharge had

struck him smartly, but innocuously, on the then most advanced part of his body. I was much perturbed at what had occurred, but Batty was overjoyed that it was no worse, and persistently declared, as was in fact true, that it was all his fault, for it was he that told me to shoot at the bird in the hedge.

"Never you mind, sir," said he. "You take this gun and the powder-flask and shot-belt, and go out into the fields this afternoon to shoot a blackbird or two. It's first-class practice, and there'll be no risk there."

I took from him the deadly engine, together with the ammunition, and went home to lunch with my wife. To her I made no mention of the catastrophe above recorded, but dilated complacently on my skill; nor had I neglected to bring with me the fallen sparrow.

"My dear," said I, "you shall yourself accompany me into the fields, and see what I can do."

My estimable helpmeet expressed fear at first, but yielded to my entreaties, and partly to her pride at the idea of seeing me carrying a gun.

We therefore sallied forth together—I having

loaded the gun in her presence to display my ready aptitude, and she, with her wistful face and dear loving eyes, standing by, so manifestly thinking me cleverer than all the world besides.

We soon made our way up the hill at the back of our vicarage, and along the footpath which led through several fields of beautiful grass land. I carried my gun, so far as I could, in the same manner as I had observed that Batty did, and made it my object to appear entirely at home with the weapon.

So much was I occupied with my efforts in this direction, that I neglected to look out for the game I sought, and we had walked some distance without any result, when suddenly my wife cried out,

“Oh! look, Joseph, look! there goes a blackbird!”

I looked, saw, and, in a frenzy of meaningless haste, fired my gun into the air. The bird flew on, and alighted in a bush in the hedge at the top of the field.

“Most extraordinary thing,” said I. “The gun went off much more rapidly than I intended.”

“Oh! are you sure it’s quite safe, Joseph?”

“Perfectly safe, darling, in my hands. I have

heard that in some cases the gun is dangerous. Captain Tourtown, of Upsarah, for instance, has been known not unfrequently to leave his keepers dead or dying on the field; but you can trust me, my love."

By this time we were drawn nigh to the bush where the blackbird was known to be. The hedge was low—excepting for that bush—and I made no doubt I could have a clear shot in whatever direction the object of my quest flew. I approached stealthily—my wife held back. Nearer and nearer I came, till I was absolutely close by the fence, and my heart beating with awful violence in the emotion of the moment.

My gun was at full cock. I raised my foot and kicked the fence.

There was a worry-scurry-flurry of wings, and a bird speeding away on the other side. My gun, which was pointing in that direction, went off as before in the start of trepidation that flashed through my highly-strung nerves.

The bird fell. "Hurrah!" I shouted, and my wife came hastening up. Eagerly we looked over at our prey, and she exclaimed,

"Oh, Joseph, that isn't a blackbird. I'm sure it's a partridge."

It was, sure enough, and I had unwittingly slain it, not only out of season, but without a certificate. To make matters worse, I observed that on the high road hard by were three or four carts moving slowly along. Had the drivers seen me? That was the question. Then, to add to it all, the bird was apparently only injured in the wing, and commenced to run away into the ditch of the hedge near which we stood.

"Oh, Joseph, we shall lose it," exclaimed my wife.

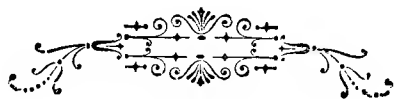
"Lose it!" said I; "I wish we had never found it."

"But, my dear, partridges are far nicer than blackbirds."

It was no use undeceiving her, and I walked moodily home, telling her I would ask John Batty to come and try to find the bird. This the good man did, after hunting the hedge diligently with his sheep-dog, and great was his exultation over the performance, for he would not admit for a moment that I had shot the partridge unintentionally—indeed he laughed immoderately at the idea, and I evidently

rose greatly in his estimation from my supposed prowess.

But for me there was only anxiety and a foreboding of ill. Had those men in the carts seen me shoot the bird or not? And if they had seen me, what would they do? I was sitting morose after dinner, and the servant came in to say a man wished to see me. My heart misgives me, but I must see him,



CHAPTER II.

“This is the man who shoots the hares.”

—*Nursery Rhyme.*

I WENT out to interview my visitor, alarmed, it may be, by an evil conscience. Had not I, Joseph Slapkins, the vicar of Norton, been guilty of breaking the laws of the land in shooting a partridge?

In my own mind I knew that I had done it unintentionally ; but, legally, I should be held to have intended the natural consequence of my act of firing the gun at the bird.

“Ah! but,” thought I, “is the death of a partridge the *natural* consequence of my discharging my piece at it? There, methinks, there is a loophole of escape. I have heard that when a man of even great experience in shooting—like Captain Tourtown—gives fire, a bird does not inevitably and invariably fall. Is it not clear, then, that when a shooter of but one day’s growth like myself pulls trigger at the flying mark, the *natural*

consequence would be a failure to strike the object of aim—that is to say, a miss? *ergo*, if I intended the natural consequence of my act, I must have intended to miss that bird.

But pshaw! what use is there in sophisms like these? After my past career would it not blast my character for ever to be even charged with an offence? Of what use would it be to me to be acquitted on a plea such as that?

Thoughts like these flashed through my mind like the swift phases of a dream as I walked slowly to the kitchen, where I found one of the idlest of my parishioners awaiting me. Jonas Pegrum was his name, and I knew that he was employed as a carter for the farmer near whose land I had in the afternoon perpetrated my crime. No doubt he was one of those who had been descending the hill when I fired the fatal shot: no doubt he had seen me, and was come to deliver me to the hands of justice. My sin—or, rather, Jonas Pegrum—had surely found me out.

Yet, though my knees trembled beneath me, and my heart seemed as it were dying away and vanishing into void, I still braced my ebbing courage so as to seem bold in the presence of the servants, and to say,

with terribly strained *nonchalance*, "Good evening, Pegrum. What is it you want?"

"Why, sir, I saw you shooting this afternoon——"

"Stay," cried I; "we won't stand here. Come into my study." And I led the way, calm with desperation now, bent only on keeping my shame secret.

"Now," I continued, when we were alone together, and the door shut; "now, Pegrum, what is it you have to propose? Your only interest in this matter can be to obtain something for yourself; and, for my part, I am willing, if I can avoid exposure, to——"

"Why, sir," broke in he, "I don't rightly know about that; but as I was a-saying, I saw you shooting this afternoon——"

"Yes, yes, I admit it."

"I saw you shooting this afternoon, and says I to Job Skelton—you'll know Job, sir—'Job,' says I, 'Mr. Slapkins 'll be wanting some more land to go over now that he's taken to shooting, and I know our Gaffer wants some one to kill his hares now that he can't get about, and so I'll just step up to Mr. Slapkins to-night and mention it to him,' and with that, sir, I've come, for it's a shame to see what a mess of hares there is on Mr. Davidson's farm, and if you was to ask

him he'd be only too glad to give you leave to shoot them."

Oh! what a relief was this to me! The man, even if he had seen what I killed, had thought nothing of it, and I—what a coward my conscience had made of me, and what a fool I had been making of myself!

"Pegrum," I exclaimed, almost rapturously, "I am indeed obliged to you; here is five shillings, and you shall have your supper. I will not forget your thoughtfulness, Pegrum, I will not indeed."

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Some days after this I had, by continuous practice with the gun, become quite dexterous in the use of the weapon, and a sparrow dumpling had already been constructed from the trophies of my skill.

"My dear," I remarked, "this dumpling is delicious. The fruit of the hunter's toil is indeed more pleasant to his taste than the choicest viands which the enervated voluptuary can buy. Is it not so, dear?"

"Yes, Joseph," replied my wife, "I daresay that is so, and I'm sure I like what you shoot better than what any one else shoots; but doesn't it strike you, darling, that there is very little on these sparrows?"

Now the partridge—it was of more value than many sparrows.”

“Nay, my own, do not quote the Scriptures, but remember that I now have a licence to shoot hares on Mr. Davidson’s farm—here it is; I have given two shillings and sixpence for it; and to-morrow, God willing, you and I will compass about these animals and destroy them.”

So it fell out that on the morrow, having consulted with the astute Pegrum, and thereby ascertained that the hares would more readily discover themselves by leaving their lurking-places in the standing corn in the cool of the evening, I walked forth and my wife with me, the gun of John Batty in my hand.

I had arrayed myself for the occasion in knickerbockers, which, with stout leggings, large boots, and a many-pocketed shooting-jacket, proclaimed me a sportsman—at least I thought so.

Very pleasant was our walk on that calm summer evening in the fresh cool air, with the sweet scent of the honeysuckle and other countless flowers wafted so often and so delicately towards us. My hard life in London, and the odours thereof, had taught me

how to value one sniff (pardon the expression) of the country, a matter of which in my earlier days I had thought nothing, for I had not then found how good it is by comparison with that which is worse.

Everything breathed of peace and happiness—and in the feeling of the moment I almost fancied myself back in the long-gone days of our honeymoon. “And yet,” I thought, “I am armed with a murderous weapon to destroy beings who may feel as happy as I, and perhaps are far more innocent.” My eyes became suffused with tears; but I hastily brushed them away when my wife eagerly pointed out to me more than one hare which had come forth for its evening pastime, and now presented a receptacle in which it behoved me to lodge the contents of my fowling-piece.

“After all,” I reflected, “beasts must be killed for the food of man.”

Be that as it may, these particular beasts showed no inclination to be killed, as they persisted in retiring, in a most uncalled-for manner, into the cover whence they had emerged just as I imagined they were about to afford me a mark at which I should be justified in taking aim,

The hares were numerous, but with one accord evasive, and the pursuit of them, though exciting, was not profitable to my new game-bag.

Presently we came to a large fallow field, adjoining one of standing corn, and between the two was a deep dry ditch. Looking cautiously ahead, we espied a hare in the very middle of this field, and my wife, with her woman's wit, bethought her of a plan.

"Joseph," said she, in great excitement, "do you hide in this ditch, and I will go right round the field on the other side of the hedge, and drive that hare towards you. It is sure to make for the corn, and, when it comes near, you can shoot it."

I was rejoiced at the idea, and at once crept along up the ditch to about midway of the fence, and she, dear soul, ran in her eagerness very quickly round, though to me, sitting with beating heart in the ditch, the time seemed long.

I constantly shifted my position, constantly tested my capacity to aim the gun, and was scarcely satisfied I had got to the best place, when she appeared through a gap on the opposite side of the field, and walked hastily towards our quarry.

The animal seemed to pay little attention to her.

Indeed, its conduct was to me excessively provoking, for it allowed her to approach so near that, had I been there with the gun, I could surely have slain it. But now it was running smartly away from her, and making for a spot in the ditch some fifty yards above where I was. Hurriedly I sped along the ditch so as to confront it, and gained in sufficient time my point. The beast was now galloping directly towards me, and I was filled with the wildest emotions.

It is nearing me rapidly—it is close at hand—I spring up—I level my weapon and fire. Behold, the audacious hare, so far from falling dead, absolutely sits up on its hind quarters, and, as it seems, gazes curiously at me, with an apparent inclination to wash its face with its fore paws.

I can endure it no longer. Again I raise my gun, this time with deliberate aim at the white stomach of the brute, trying to regard it as my accustomed paper mark.

Bang! and oh, joy, it has fallen, it has fallen!

I rush towards it, and my wife is also coming rapidly on. Victory is ours, and prospective hare soup.

But the creature has declined to die. On the

contrary, it kicks and wriggles in an alarming fashion, and yells in a most heartrending manner, for all the world like a child. I catch hold of it by the fore leg, but it strikes me violently with its hind ones, and for aught I know it may bite. I am spattered with its gore, and I drop it.

“Oh, poor beast,” cries my wife; “why don’t you put it out of its misery, Joseph?”

Why, indeed? Simply because I hardly know how. Ha, my knife! Of course, I will cut its throat. I open my large sailor’s knife, and, after several ineffectual thrusts, I drive it into the neck of the hare and deep into the ground. Death shortly afterwards supervenes, and, with a feeling almost of faintness after the severe and bloody struggle, I raise the corpse and place it with a slight shudder in my bag.

These horrors were, however, soon forgotten in our joy at the result of our efforts. The gun was re-loaded, and we anxiously sought for more game, but without further success; so that, as the shades of evening were drawing on, it was decided to adjourn the delicious pastime for another occasion, and at present depart homeward.

We were within half a mile of our journey's end when I remembered that my gun was yet loaded, and I must needs, for safety's sake, fire it off before taking it into the house.

I was now in one of my own glebe fields, and I prepared to discharge the weapon. Why, thought I, should I waste time? I will fire both barrels together; and, as I put up the gun, I observed the house of William Cox—generally known as Will Cox—directly in my line of fire, some hundred and fifty yards off. Will Cox was a dissenting minister, for whom I entertained anything but cordial feelings, and it may be that the idea of aiming at his house was rather attractive to me. Batty had told me that the gun would not kill at more than fifty or sixty yards' distance, and I never dreamed of *hitting* the house for one moment, for I thought it far out of shot.

Pointing towards the upper windows, I pulled both triggers. The recoil was severe, but I forgot that in an instant, for I heard a distinct crash, and running in awful anxiety forwards, could plainly see that every pane in one window at least had been broken!

CHAPTER III.

“There’s Lucifer lying blind drunk with Scotch ale.”

—*Ingoldsby Legends.*

ON observing that I had in good truth utterly destroyed Will Cox’s windows, I stood stupefied, my hair rose on end, and my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth, as I remember was the case with several gentlemen—whom the poet Virgil tells us of—when they were placed in peculiarly alarming positions.

My first active impulse was to run away, but then came the voice of my wife, “Joseph, Joseph, what *have* you done?” and I recovered presence of mind enough to sum up the situation. No doubt I had been seen; if I ran away my crime would be clearly brought home to me. The only course wherein lay a chance of safety was to boldly go to the house, confront Will Cox, and explain that it was an accident. This would be peculiarly disagreeable to me, looking at our relative positions—he a dissenting preacher and propagator of

vile and Radical notions among the electors ; I, a clergyman of the Established Church and a zealous Conservative : nevertheless, it had to be done, and asking my wife to wait for me, I walked steadily to the battered domicile.

It was now very clear to me what damage I had done by the ill-advised discharge of my fowling-piece —every pane in one of the upper windows of the house being thoroughly broken ; and yet I can with truth affirm that the distance at which I had stood was one hundred and fifty yards. I have had it measured since, and can show the place to any one who doubts me.

A horrible fear crept over me lest I might have killed some of the inmates, and gloomy thoughts arose as to whether I was not predestined to evil in any dealings I might have with the paraphernalia of sport.

I certainly felt very uncomfortable as I knocked at the door, and at last heard steps coming. A small girl opened the portal of the dissenter's abode.

“Is Mr. Will Cox within?”

“No, sir,” and she burst out crying. “Oh, sir, please sir, is this the Judgment Day, sir? Oh! the house is falling down. Oh, o-o-oh!” and so forth.

I soon ascertained that the terrible crashing of the windows had been traced by her to no conceivable cause, and so she thought the end of all things was at hand. Will Cox, it seems, was away preaching, and heartily glad was I to miss him ; nevertheless, I conquered my impulse to go away and say no more about it, and I therefore wrote on a card :—

“SIR,—I am sorry to say that I have, through a misadventure, broken your windows. I must ask you to be good enough to let the bill for repairs be sent in to me.—Yours obediently,

“JOSEPH SLAPKINS.”

I left the girl, having assured her that the end was not yet, and rejoined my wife, who was much put out by the whole performance, inasmuch as she disliked Cox even more than I did, and she was quite cross with me for what she termed my stupidity. Sweet soul ! very, very rarely indeed did she give way to anger.

But the shades of night had now drawn rapidly on—in fact, it was almost dark. There was about a quarter of a mile of road before we came to the village and our home, and along this frequent vehicles

were proceeding on their way back from Bunkum Fair, the drivers and other occupants making glad the blessed eventide with mirthful cries and jovial shouts, the overflow, as it struck me, of hearts happy in a day well spent, in work well done, in repose well earned.

“Hey, there! get out o’ t’ way, ye silly-looking devil!” roared a stentorian voice from behind; and I had just time to draw my wife with me upon the bank of the hedge when two tax-carts filled with men galloped past with somewhat ribald cries, and I began to think that the frequenters of fairs are not of absolute necessity worthy persons.

Looking somewhat anxiously after the receding carts, I observed the foremost one suddenly pull on one side, and heard those within it cry out loudly to their followers, who swerved off likewise. “There must be something on the road,” said I; and we walked hurriedly on, the tax-carts now rapidly vanishing with their drunken freights into the darkness. Soon we came across a corpse-like figure stretched out across the very middle of the road, and, after the very first start of alarm was over, I kneeled down to investigate. It was Jonas Pegrum

lying flat on his back, overcome with drink. I knew he had been driving a cart to and from the fair—no doubt he had fallen out of it—and considered it right to illustrate the line, “Where the tree falleth there let it lie.”

But what an escape had been his! To have lain there in the dark night, and to have been *seen* and *avoided* by swiftly-driving drunkards—verily it was marvellous.

“Pegrum,” I cried, “Pegrum, you must get up; you mustn’t lie here. You’ll be run over.”

A few muttered sounds, breaking into confused gurgles, and then he articulated these memorable words:

“Run over me? I should like to see ’em do it. I shall be forced to be havin’ a rap at some of ’em,” and with that he again collapsed, nor could any efforts of mine arouse him; so, by dint of great exertion, I dragged him through a gap at the roadside, and left him in the field, where, at least, the fate he had challenged could not befall him.

The incident, terrible though it was in its moral aspect, was not without a certain touch of humour, and my wife was quite restored to temper by a little

laugh at it. We called at Pegrum's cottage, which was a very short distance beyond the vicarage, and told his wife what had occurred, so that she might take means for conveying him home.

"Oh, a nasty drunken vagabond!" cried she. "I wish somebody *would* run over him: he may lie there all night for aught I care."

"Ah, Joseph," said my wife as we walked away, "how happy I ought to be that you are not like Pegrum."

I hardly knew whether to regard this as a compliment or not; indeed, it seemed to me that to be judged by the standard of Pegrum was scarcely gratifying, even to those whose superiority might be marked by such means.

However, that by the way. The uproar of the returning drunkards increased more and more, and my wife, about bed-time, growing nervous, implored me to load the gun, so as to be ready to defend us in case of need. I did so, nothing loth, and, placing it by my bedside, soon relapsed into placid slumbers.

It must have been somewhere past midnight when I awoke—wide awake—in that mysterious fashion that all of us at times experience: something, I felt

assured, was happening, and I put my hand out of bed to feel if the gun was still there. It was all right. Ha! what is that? a sound at the back door I am sure; and I slip, half timorously, out of bed and make for the window, striking my pet corn in agonizing wise against a chair or something as I go.

Our window is in a wing of the house, and looks out at right angles with the back door, so that I shall be able to command a view if the darkness permits. There, again the sound!

It is always our habit to sleep with the window wide open, so I am able to look out quite noiselessly. Good God!—yes, there is—there undoubtedly is a burglar at work at our back door! I can dimly descry his figure as he leans against the door.

“Joseph, Joseph, what’s the matter?” exclaims my wife, suddenly waking and starting up.

“Nothing, dear, nothing,” and I step into the room with intent to calm her fears.

“Oh! nonsense, I know there’s something, or you never would be looking out like that,” and she too has jumped up.

I, who am now by the bedside, again come across the gun, and almost without thinking at first, take it

up. My wife is approaching the window. I step forward to prevent her ; it is no use, I must tell her.

“Listen, dear : there is a man trying to get in at the back door ; but never fear, I will protect you.”

She stands panicstricken for a moment, while I again look forth into the night, this time advancing my gun before me almost instinctively. In a moment now my wife recovers, and rushes forward.

“Come back this moment, Joseph,” she cries, “don’t put your head outside, you’ll be killed !”

The man at the door is disturbed by the noise, turns and points something towards me.

She, with the courage of a true woman, has come to the front to drag me from the danger—and she sees the figure.

“Quick, he’s going to shoot you!” she screams ; and in the flash of terror her words inspire me, and in the baseless thought of self-preservation, without placing the gun to my shoulder, I make what I now know is called a “snap shot” in the direction of the enemy, and dash back into the room.

There is a moment’s silence, and then, through the still night, comes up a groan. Oh ! what have I done—what have I done ?

To the window again ; as I feared, there is the dark object stretched across the doorstep, and without a moment's hesitation I get a light and hasten down to ascertain the worst. My wife follows, pale and trembling. The back door is opened at last, and we look eagerly yet fearfully on the figure outside.

Merciful heavens ! this is no burglar—it is Jonas Pegrum ! He has staggered as far as here by mistake ; what he pointed at me was this stick of his—and I—oh ! what shall I do ?—have shot him.

Pegrum turned out to be at least alive, but he was seriously injured, my discharge having struck him in the shoulder. With great difficulty, and with the assistance of Lord Neversham's interest, I got the matter hushed up ; but, in consideration thereof, I was saddled with the duty of supporting the damaged man, his wife, and family during the rest of their natural career. He soon recovered from his wound, and was no doubt thankful for the happy chance that had brought him within range of my weapon, for he could now drink with impunity, or rather, I should say, without having to work for the money wherewith to pay for his potations.

Pegrum has been an incubus, a horrid bugbear, to

me ever since that night, and his wife is, as it seems to me, unnaturally prolific ; but how can I complain ?

Worse than the circumstances attendant on the shooting of Pegrum was the result of my unfortunate breaking of Will Cox's window.

It is true that the man hardly went so far as to charge me in public with the act as having been a malicious one. No, in some sort he pocketed the affront—if such he deemed it—and also a considerable sum of my money, which he wrote me was due for the repairs, and for the disbursement of which, by the way, I never received vouchers.

But divers rumours soon spread around, emanating no doubt from him, and more than one anonymous epistle did I receive of a most irritating character.

I select one which, from the profanity of its wretched doggerel, particularly incensed me : —

Will Cox, whose soul no sin-spot stains,
Was preaching out one night ;
And Slapkins broke his window-panes
To gratify his spite.

“Through glass into that man's domain
Too long I darkly see,
And with his merits I would fain
Be face to face,” cried he.

Then quickly at the shining glass
He fired his wicked gun,
And so the breakage came to pass
Through him—the gun's vile son.

But as on Moses' shining face
The Hebrew could not look ;
So to the parson faith and grace
Are still a sealed book.

And Will Cox to the sinner's eye
Invisible remained,
Endowed with glory from on high—
And *Slapkins* felt quite *pained*.

“And Slapkins felt quite pained?” repeated I ;
“was there ever a more absurd anticlimax or a more
atrocious outrage on the proprieties of ornate lan-
guage? Perish these anonymous jargon dealers!
But, ha ! what's this in the paper?”

Some one had forwarded me the *York Herald*,
with a passage in one of the leaders marked. How
kind some friends are ! The article was on the
“Burials Question,” and the paragraph to which my
rapt attention was called was as follows :—

“The times are past when an enlightened people
will submit to the guidance of a bigoted clergy.
Already there have been scandals enough arising

from the wicked intolerance of these gentlemen, who have consistently opposed all liberal measures. As we go to press another report comes to hand, which we hope, for the credit—such as still remains—of this obsolete profession, is untrue. We give the substance of it, omitting the names until we have verified the accuracy:—‘Mr. —, the vicar of —, a gentleman whose previous experiences might at least have taught him humility, on the evening of Wednesday last absolutely, in his rancorous hatred of an estimable nonconformist minister named —, discharged a gun at the upper windows of the good man’s house. Fortunately the owner was not at home, being engaged at a service some miles away, otherwise murder might have resulted, and in any case the criminality of the intention is obvious.’ Our report stops here, but we make no doubt that if this last crowning pitch of intemperate malice had really been reached in the manner stated—the reverend (*sic*) gentleman will not only have to be suspended from his living (that is no new experience to him), but in default of being suspended by his neck—a punishment he has come near deserving—he will have an opportunity of expiating in gaol his heinous

offence. Mr. —, the nonconformist minister, is a man universally respected. It is true that certain spiteful persons once proclaimed that, being an official of the N.-E. Railway Company, and having a free pass, he nevertheless charged his railway expenses to the congregations for whose benefit he journeyed to deliver his discourses—but the best of us are not wholly free from the shafts of malice, and such as these certainly did little harm to Mr. —."

I dropped the paper aghast. What a fearful position had that unfortunate gun led me into! Was I really to be prosecuted?



CHAPTER IV.

“Thus do I seat myself; now do your worst. Firm as an adamantine rock will I repel ye all.”—*Anon.*

I AM happy to say a visit to my solicitor and a letter from him to the *York Herald* produced a suitable *amende* from that paper, which I must confess reflected great credit on those connected with the management of it.

It was acknowledged that my breaking of Will Cox's windows was purely accidental; and here my remarks anent Will Cox would terminate were it not that I feel constrained to diverge from the direct bent of my narrative in order to set out what subsequently befell him.

It had so happened a short while previously that there had been an election for the borough of Thrusk—the old Conservative member, Sir William Alway, having concluded to retire. At the last contested election before this for the borough Major Stabletone had represented the Liberal interest, but there had also

come before the electors one Sir William Lackland, who purported to be a Conservative.

It was asked why he came, and it transpired that he was possessed by inheritance of the Lackland title, but that the estates appurtenant thereto had, whether by the neglect of himself or his progenitors, been expended and otherwise dispersed in a manner which, though extremely complete, was not commendably judicious.

Lady Alway, the wife of the then sitting member for Thrusk, was one of a collateral branch of the same family as Sir William Lackland, and she and those connected with her being more wise in their generation had preserved their property intact; whereat Sir William Lackland, moved by the same spirit that caused the foolish virgins to say, "Give us of your oil, our lamps are gone out," had thought fit to demand that this property of Lady Alway's should be delivered to him inasmuch as he was the proud possessor of the family title.

Strangely enough, Sir William Alway and his wife failed to see the matter in this light, and actually evinced an inclination to adhere to that which was their own. Whereupon Sir William Lackland waxed

wroth, and vowed to unseat his unreasonable relative at the next election, by way of vengeance.

Upon that occasion his purpose was frustrated, for the gentleman whom he considered his chief supporter drove him right away on the nomination day to get a cheque cashed, and brought him back no more until it was too late for him to be nominated.

Nevertheless, being buoyed up by spite, he continued to frequent the borough with a view to better luck next time. Many, many visits did he pay to the various hostelries on market and other days, and his advent was always anxiously watched for by Jonas Pegrum and others of a like kidney, who were ready to hail him as their future member, and promise him any amount of votes, well knowing that he would in consequence be constrained to give them "glasses round," the which being consumed, Jonas Pegrum and Co. would inwardly chuckle, never having entertained the smallest idea in reality of deserting their old member. But Sir William Lackland never failed to take what they said in sober earnest, and so plumed himself on having received the promise of very large support.

He had, moreover, bestowed an offering of blankets

upon the rector, for distribution among the poor, but had been far from satisfied by the way in which the reverend gentleman dispensed his benevolence, inasmuch as widows or old single women were selected as the recipients.

However, to cut short the story, when the next election came, and Sir William Alway retired, he cordially desired that his mantle should fall on the shoulders of Colonel Rayne Mornay, who was the candidate chosen by the Conservative Association.

Sir William Lackland knew that by opposing this gentleman he was in reality opposing his obnoxious kinsman, and so persisted in his intention of going to the poll.

Major Stabletone was again in the field, backed by Will Cox, Mr. Bartholomew, Mr. Thomas Jones, and other influential persons, and fear was entertained that any few votes Sir William Lackland might obtain would seriously imperil Colonel Mornay's chance.

Nay, the Lacklandish confidence had so increased as the time drew near that Sir William actually wrote to the Carlton Club, or otherwise communicated with those in authority, to the effect that he had 600 promises, and should prefer Colonel Mornay to be

withdrawn for fear the seat might be sacrificed. His request was not complied with.

When the time came still nearer he delivered a speech by reading the same.

When the polling day arrived he had not neglected to charter many conveyances to take his voters to the poll. When the poll was declared he was found to have received ten votes!!

Colonel Mornay was returned by a majority of sixty-three over Major Stabletone.

Will Cox among others was furious, and clamoured loudly about bribery, treating, and undue influence, but Major Stabletone accepted his defeat as a gentleman should, and nothing more would have come of the matter, but that Mr. Ashe, Sir William Lackland's agent, finding his client desperately enraged and envenomed with what had happened, induced him—though a professed Conservative—to tax his resources by finding the £1,000 necessary to be lodged by those who file petitions.

Will Cox, Mr. Fillcheck, and one or two cobblers (cobblers are always Radicals), were thereupon made the formal petitioners—Sir William Lackland not going the length of allowing his name to appear—and

the trial was presently fixed to take place at York. A detective, by name Nasalswine, had been brought down from London with a view to ferreting out the charges, and the world was assured that, if such a thing as a certainty existed, Col. Rayne Mornay's downfall was that certainty.

Sir William Lackland, it is true, had a moment's hesitation. His conscience smote him, not on account of his going against his own party, but on account of the possible jeopardy of his £1,000.

Mr. Ashe, Mr. Nasalswine, and Will Cox, however soon cheered him up, and persuaded him to promise his bond for another £400, so as to secure the counsel's fees.

In due course the end came. Jonas Pegrum, who had been in a stupor of intoxication on the election day, had found half a crown in his pocket on the ensuing morning. It was urged that Jonas Pegrum had been bribed.

Jonas Pegrum had consumed drink—not at his own expense—on the election day. *Ergo* he must have been corruptly treated.

In the witness-box, however, he announced that he had been a professor of Conservative principles

during the last fifty years ; that he always got drunk whenever he had the chance ; that he was constantly and perpetually treated, never, in fact, paying on his own behalf—the election day being in this respect no different to him from any other day ; that he had voted the first thing in the morning, and that he didn't like being “put on” in this way.

Thereupon having defiantly contradicted Mr. Justice Penman, who opined “that he was evidently a black-guard,” he left the box.

The first day of the trial was over, and Will Cox was observed to smile gleefully all over his unctuous countenance. Sir William Lackland had been constantly running after the petitioners' able counsel, Mr. Blatherly Tones, and it was said that the result of the petition was still beyond doubt.

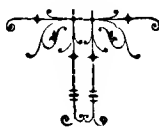
Next day the bubble burst. Of the multitude of witnesses not one proved anything to advance the petitioners' cause ; and to the horror of Will Cox and Co. the petition was dismissed **with costs**!!

Sir William Lackland, who had been anything but kindly received as he passed through the crowd of waiting witnesses on his way to the court, stayed until he heard the judicial words, “Unusually pure

election"—“If ever there was a petition which ought to be dismissed with *costs*, this is the one.” Then he turned and fled, while the thunders of applause from the crowd waiting anxiously outside rang in his ears, and proclaimed that Liberals and Conservatives alike were overjoyed at his defeat.

Will Cox, livid with disappointment not uncoupled with apprehension, returned to his home.

The question to his mind was, how about the costs which the petitioners had incurred—making sure that they would get them from the respondent? The respondent now being enabled to consume Sir W Lackland’s thousand pounds, whence would the petitioners procure the wherewithal to pay their own large expenses? That is the question!



CHAPTER V

“What is that? It is the cat.”

—*H.M.S. Pinafore.*

AND now the shooting season was fast approaching. My practice had been arduous and incessant, and I could at last strike a blackbird or sparrow with a tolerable degree of precision—in the former case even when the bird was flying.

So pleased was I with my skill and the prospect of what I should be able to do in the case of larger birds, such as grouse, partridges, and, above all, pheasants, that I had already decided to purchase myself a gun, and had commissioned Mr. Pope of Newcastle-on-Tyne to construct one for me accordingly.

One thing I had all but forgotten, and that was a dog, but my wife, with her usual thought, called my attention to the subject, and I set about procuring a suitable animal. I had obtained leave to shoot over Mr. Davidson's and one or two other farms, and I had

purchased my certificate, so that the dog alone was needed, for the gun would arrive in due course.

My first idea was to consult Pegrum, but I found him unable to advise me—whether from lack of knowledge or excess of drink I know not, but Lord Neversham, whom I met as I was walking home one Sunday evening from church, and to whom I mentioned my requirement, very kindly suggested that I should look among the advertisements in the *Field* newspaper, and still more kindly sent over a man with the paper in question for my perusal.

There, among a long list of dogs advertised, the following struck my fancy: “For immediate sale—the owner giving up shooting—*Don*, a fine liver and white, large, upstanding pointer dog, fourth season, very staunch. Drops to wing, fur, and shot. An excellent dog for an old gentleman or a beginner. Price £5. Apply to W E. G., Taunton.”

I discussed the matter at some length with my wife. There was an imposing appearance about this advertisement, and it also sounded well, though I was fain to confess I did not understand the exact meaning of the expressions in detail. I concluded, however, that “upstanding” was meant to refer to the natural

attitude of the creature, and to afford a marked antithetical contrast to his alleged capacity to "drop ;" as to the "fourth season," I took it to imply that the dog was "well seasoned," *i.e.*, not merely "seasoned," but "quadruply seasoned"—a similar use of terms being, as it occurred to me, the denomination of treble X, XXX, as applied to ale. The epithet "staunch" no doubt was an allusion to the dog's firm friendship for his master, and quite aroused my pity for the poor dumb brute who was thus destined to be ruthlessly separated from the object of his devotion.

"My dear," I cried, "my mind is made up ; I will purchase this 'staunch' dog, so that we may be kind to him and comfort him. Who knows but that time, which softens all grief, may wipe out his regret for his old master, and at length divert his staunchness to me ?"

"Oh, yes, Joseph, by all means buy him ! It will be so nice to have a dog. It would be a great safeguard to have him to sleep in our room, would it not ?"

"Yes, my love ; but I must inquire first whether he is suitable for that purpose."

Without more ado I wrote to "W. E. G.," explain-

ing my views. with regard to *Don*, and enclosing a cheque for £5, with a request that the hound should be dispatched to me forthwith. I also asked for instructions as to his treatment, the method adopted in feeding him, the words to be used when I wanted to denote my wishes to him, and the expressions of command applicable to every problem of the chase.

A letter arrived by return, which ran as follows:—

“REVEREND SIR,—Yours to hand with £5, and thanks for same. *Don* goes to you to-morrow by 10.15 train. You need not be particular as to his food; he will eat anything, and if allowed to run at large will provide for himself. You may find him a little wild at first, as he has not been shot over for two seasons; but he is a good *staunch* dog, and will show you sport.

“You will not find it necessary to give him any command when you want him to ‘range,’ for he will do so without being told. If he points, you may, should you feel so inclined, cry ‘*Ho!*’ It will, perhaps, serve to steady him; and when you have fired you should shout, ‘Drop,’ or, ‘Down charge.’ If you have a whip, you will do well to flog ‘*Don*’ in the

morning before you commence, as it will sober him. I think there is nothing more I can tell you. Hoping you will like the dog,—I remain, yours obediently,

“W. E. G.”

There was something a little inhuman, I thought, about this idea of flogging the poor dog as a preventive against his prospective misdeeds, and I inwardly resolved that, for my part, I would rule him by kindness.

The rest of the letter was hardly so explicit as I could have wished, but I soon forgot that in my anxiety to behold my new purchase, for the train by which he was coming would very soon be due. I accordingly hurried off to Bunkum Station, having previously set Pegrum to work preparing an outhouse for the reception of the dog, and having directed my wife to have ready a bowl of warm bread and milk to refresh the traveller on his arrival.

I awaited the train with almost childish eagerness, and rushed to the guard's van when it at length arrived.

“Is there a dog for me?”

“Yes, here's a dog for Mr. Slapkins, and there'll

be some damage to pay. He's been and eaten a hole into that hamper, and killed three prize rabbits from Crewe Show. However, you'll hear about it before long." And before I could reply the train was gone and I was standing on the platform holding the dog by a chain.

He was certainly very large, but beyond that his fatness was positively astonishing. He seemed to be loaded with mountainous rolls of flesh, and as he pulled lustily at the chain he appeared to breathe in a very stertorous and apoplectic manner. Thinking it well to conciliate him at the outset, I addressed him by name in kind tones. "Poor Don, fine old fellow; good dog, then," &c., &c., and as I patted him he looked up at me with eyes somewhat lacking in lustre, yet as it seemed to me with an honest expression in his large liver-coloured countenance, in which a multitude of grey hairs betokened a life that had not been devoid of trouble.

The snuffling gruffness of his breath caused me some little uncasiness, and I relaxed his collar one hole to give him ease. Then I set off to lead him home. The story of the rabbits I scarce credited. Surely in any case the company would be responsible

for their loss. However, there was time enough to think of that.

Don was by no means an easy creature to lead. He kept rushing from one side of me to the other, and occasionally turning back with great suddenness to inspect some portion of the road, a hedge which by an afterthought he seemed to conclude he had been ill-advised in passing by. These manœuvres caused me great inconvenience, as he was very weighty and powerful, and not only tugged me violently hither and thither till I was quite spent with exhaustion, but more than once completely tripped me up by getting the chain round my legs, and then darting back on the way that we had been coming, as I have already described. My ardour and exultation in the possession of the dog were somewhat damped by the time I got home, and I appeared quite travel-stained and weary when I at length got to my journey's end, and sank into a chair in the kitchen, still holding the chain, while my wife, the servants, and Pegrum clustered admiringly round, patted Don on the head, and finally offered to him a beautiful bowl of bread and milk. This the dog at once attacked voraciously, and it certainly struck

me that hitherto his actions seemed too much guided by thoughtless impulse, and as it were by a kind of selfishness that hardly pleased me.

“Poor thing; how hungry it is!” said my wife; and this really appeared to be the case, to judge from the vulgar “sossing” sounds, the flopping of lips, and not altogether unpiglike inclination of the creature to his meal.

I confess the spectacle somewhat offended my æsthetic tastes, and the obese carcase of the hound was by no means improved in symmetry by the performance.

However, anxious to terminate the scene, I announced my intention of taking Batty’s gun and walking out at once with Don into the fields to test his capacities in the chase. I could not of course as yet shoot at the partridges, but I might find a rabbit, hare, or sparrow, and I was wishful to observe the demeanour of the dog when under fire.

The gun being loaded, I set out alone—discarding the proffered services of Pegrum—and the dog without doubt appeared to welcome the sight of a fire-arm, for he readily accompanied me, and even indulged in elephantine gambols and contortions

around me. This trait in the animal's character was certainly more attractive, and I felt my pleasure and satisfaction in being the owner of him rapidly revive now that he displayed obvious signs of intelligence.

We soon came to a rough grass field in Davidson's farm, and upon this we entered. Don at once commenced to gallop from side to side with mechanical regularity.

"Surely," thought I, "how wonderful is the educated instinct of the dog! This, no doubt, is what is termed 'ranging'—a feat that Don will actually perform without command or instruction from me. In this his late owner has told me no more than the truth."

Finding no game in this field, we made our way to some turnips which had thus early attained a considerable growth, and here I made sure we should be successful, as I watched the busy and laborious efforts of the dog, and listened to his hoarse panting as he crossed and recrossed me this way and that.

Good Heavens! behold him! Struck sudden as by lightning he stands cataleptic, gazing forward among the turnip-tops!

His tail is stiffly outstretched—one fore foot is raised. It must be—yes, it clearly is—yes, there is no doubt of it—the dog is pointing, and is beckoning me the way that I should go.

Let me see, what is it I was to say to him upon such an occasion? I have forgotten, but fortunately have the man's letter by me. Ah! here it is. "Ho" is the word, and so I say "Ho" loudly.

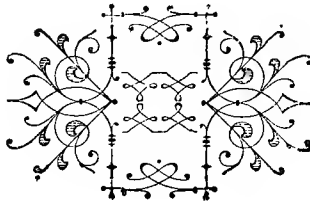
And now to advance and put up the game. I must not shoot if it is partridge, but if a hare or a rabbit, then I will give fire.

I see the turnip-tops moving some ten yards in front of the dog, who looks round to me anxiously, as if to say, "Come on quickly."

How supremely intelligent the creature is! and now I get a glimpse of fur speeding along up the row of turnips, from where my attention was first fixed, and at once I level and fire—nor do I forget to shout, "Down charge!" but the dog, with perhaps pardonable excitement, rushes forward to ascertain the result. I myself cannot refrain from accompanying him.

Yes, yes! I have been successful! I have killed!

Don is turning over the dead hare with his nose. I seize it up. Merciful Heavens! It is neither a hare nor yet a rabbit, but *a cat, a large yellow cat!*



CHAPTER VI.

“Oh for the bliss of my sweet childhood’s days,
When innocent I roamed the forest through,
Nor yet had entered on deceitful ways,
When thoughts and words and acts alike were true!

“But now alas! in speech attuned to guile
A most mendacious tongue I falsely wag,
Fearing my sin may find me out, the while,
And the dread cat be let from out the bag.”

—*Anon.*

I BELIEVE as I write now that even the shooting of Pegrum did not affect me with such dismay as the destruction of that yellow cat. I gazed at the corpse in dismay while the atrocious hound, Don, mouthed it over with bestial pleasure, and, so far as I could judge from the self-satisfied wag of his tail and his generally exuberant demeanour, took no small credit to himself for having brought about the catastrophe. The cat was sleek and well fed; no doubt it was some one’s pet; it had been basking out among the turnips in the heat of the day—or stay, these remains

of a dead rabbit seem to show that it had been engaged like myself in the pursuit of game.

One thing is certain—I must away, and that speedily. No one has seen me, or even knows that I have been in this field. I will fly. This is no sooner said than done; I do not stay even to reload my gun, but hastily driving my vile and malignant dog from his prey, I hurry off at best speed, and he accompanies me—at least I imagine he does.

I have now put a good half-mile between myself and the fatal spot, and being quite out of breath, I pause and look around. Where is Don?

He is nowhere in sight, and I whistle and call for him loudly a long time without avail. At last there comes a scrambling through the big hedge near to where I am standing; he is here, but a death-like tremor seizes me when I perceive that he is bearing in his mouth the cat, my victim, the token of my guilt! Gravely he deposits it at my feet, and looks up at me as if demanding approbation. In good truth the dog is becoming loathly in my eyes, and my words to him are such as are but ill suited to my sacred calling.

The cat, bedrabbled now with mud and wet,

mingled with gore, lies at my feet stark and stiff, glaring horribly from its widely-opened eyes. It is like a fearful nightmare, or some outrageous ghost story, and in the panic of the moment the thought strikes me that I am to be pursued by the body of this cat for ever. "Who," I exclaim, in my agony of soul, "who shall deliver me from the body of this cat?"

Soon, however, calmer reasoning prevails, and I set about devising some means for effectually disposing of the creature. Necessity is the mother of invention, and seeing that the soil where I am standing is very light and sandy, I address myself to the task of digging a grave in it, partly by scraping with my hands, partly by digging with a flat stone, looking ever and anon this way and that to see if any one is coming, feeling myself to be at last indeed a criminal. Don, notwithstanding he had aided and abetted me in the slaughter, looked complacently on as I dug, nor did the guilt of blood seem to weigh at all upon his conscience.

"Oh!" thought I, "if any of my parishioners could see me—Joseph Slapkins, the vicar—burying a cat that he has foully slain! It is true I thought the

beast was a hare or a rabbit, but who would believe that? And who would believe that the base and deceitful hound misled me by pointing out the victim as he did? They would say, 'He is a pointer of game, not of cats,' and I should appear to them not only as one who sins, but as one who lies in order to cloak his sin!"

Reflections such as this course one after the other through my perturbed brain, but meanwhile my task is progressing, and having made an excavation to the depth of about a foot, I push the body in, though icy thrills of horror seem to strike to my very vitals, and then in desperate hurry cover up the dead with earth, finally stamping in very frenzy on the grave, so as to make it firm and secure. Then again do I turn and fly, this time taking care not to lose sight of Don.

On arriving at my home I found my new gun had arrived from Mr. Pope, of Newcastle, and this for a while diverted my mind. I consigned Don to Pegrum, who chained him up in the place appointed for his abode, and then I proceeded to examine my new purchase. It seemed, indeed, an admirable piece of workmanship, and my wife and I thought

we should never tire of looking through the gleaming barrels and admiring the delicate tracery that ornamented the locks. The great difficulty was how to put it together—our efforts in this line being singularly ineffectual—while Don, who had concluded to firmly protest against being chained up, howled so loudly the while and so persistently that reasonable discussion was impossible. The outcries of the dog becoming absolutely unbearable at last, I was fain to go and release him; then, seeing that he evinced no inclination to run away, I returned to find that my wife—clever as usual—had mastered the mystery of the fowling-piece, and was in the very act of fitting it together.

How admirable it was when the operation was complete! How different from Batty's cumbrous weapon, on which I now looked with contempt! How carefully I must keep it, with a most strict observance of all the directions for cleaning the beautiful barrels! Then there were the cartridges—some of them loaded ready, some merely cases, with respect to which instructions were not wanting. The machine for filling and turning down these cartridges was also forthcoming, and in my childish delight at my

acquisitions I was about to screw it on to the new table in our morning room so as to make trial of it at once. To this, however, my wife decidedly demurred.

This, notwithstanding, we spent fully an hour in talking over and examining the gun and its paraphernalia, so that the supper hour had passed by some time. My wife noticed this first.

"Why, Joseph," cried she, "you must be famished after all the exercise you have taken to-day! Come along to supper. Fortunately everything is cold, as I let the servants go out to-night, and told them to put the things on the table before they went."

"Well, my dear," replied I, "I must confess, now my attention is called to it, I am somewhat hungry."

"I'm sure you must be; there's some beautiful cold lamb and a duck—and gooseberry fool, I know you like that."

I had no time to reply for we had now entered the dining-room, where we made no doubt we should find our evening meal.

There was the table ready—the plates, knives, forks, and other accoutrements of the civilized eater, but where was the food?

"Those stupid servants!" angrily exclaimed my wife. "I told them as plain as I could speak to bring the things in."

But I was looking with an ominous feeling of dread upon certain brown marks which defiled the otherwise spotless table-cloth; then I cried an exceeding bitter cry, "My darling, the food *has* been brought in: see, there are the dishes on which it has stood; but—but it *has been taken away!*"

"Taken away! What do you mean, Joseph?"

My heart was too full to speak, but I drew her nearer to the table and pointed out one of the brown marks. It was the distinct imprint of the foot or paw of a dog!

Not Robinson Crusoe on first finding the trace of Friday's foot upon the sand could have been more astounded than was she; but her astonishment soon gave way to exasperation.

"Joseph, do you mean to say that Don has dared—after taking all the beautiful bread and milk I gave him—to come here and steal a leg of lamb and a duck?"

"I fear, my darling, it must be so."

"Must be so; and pray what do you intend to do? Do you intend to calmly bear it?"

"Well, dear, I don't see very well what I can do."

"Don't tell me! There, I declare if he hasn't licked up all the gooseberry fool as well! one might almost have thought the dish was clean. Joseph, I insist on your whipping that dog in such a manner that he will never forget it."

"Very well, dear, I will go and get my new dog whip."

I had not long to search when I sallied forth in quest of the thief. He was among the shrubs at the bottom of the lawn, and having eaten as much of his spoils as he was able, he was busily employed in burying the remainder.

"Don," said I, in reproachful tones, "Don." He gave a sullen glance at me, but did not quit his position. "Oh, you bad dog!" I continued, as I advanced to him, holding the whip menacingly aloft. Judge of my surprise when, instead of showing contrition and shame, he gave vent to a savage growl, and baring what remained to him of teeth, evidently defied me. I paused irresolute. The hardened villainy of the dog fairly took the breath out of me, and as I paused his aspect waxed more and more ferocious, till he seemed to me as it were a grinning,

swearing demon. He was evidently about to spring on me, and I turned and executed a strategic movement to the rear.

I durst not go in and tell my wife of this, so I was obliged to hang about till the dog should think fit to leave the cairn which he had constructed, and then I determined to allure him into the stable, and having chained him up, flog him from a position of security.

This all came about much more easily than I expected. I had laid aside my whip, and Don after a while thought fit to emerge from the shrubs, whereupon he came up to me wagging his tail as if nothing had happened. In due course I secured him, and then standing at a safe distance chastised him with considerable severity. His howls and the fierce though impotent gnashing of his jaws as he strove to reach me were terrible to hear and to witness. My wife, however, was pleased to consider herself avenged, and she and I with tolerable equanimity made our frugal repast of bread and milk, that being all which the ravages of the hound had left to us.

Very hideous, however, did Don make that night, for as it seemed to me he howled during the whole

of it, without the slightest pretence of cessation. It was simply awful; and as the hours passed slowly on, I lay and cursed the evil genius that had led me to select the advertisement in which this particular dog was offered for sale.

But worse was yet to come. The next day my wife and I were to dine at Bunkum Park—rather an important event with us—and I directed Pegrum to let the hound have an evening run while we were away, so as, if possible, to calm its perturbed spirits.

There was rather a numerous party at the great house, and we were all sitting in the drawing-room before dinner—when Lady Neversham remarked to me.

“I am in such trouble, Mr. Slapkins; I’ve lost poor Tommy, my cat; he’s not been seen since yesterday morning.”

I gave a start, and felt as if I was turning pale.

“What was he like?” I asked, speaking as naturally as I could.

“Oh! a yellow colour—like apricots—and such a fine big fellow! You haven’t come across him in your rambles, have you?”

“No,” gasped I; “no, I have not seen him.”

Was it fate, evil fate, that thus brought me face to face with the owner of that cat? My heart was sinking within me, and my self-esteem was fast vanishing—for had I not in my cowardice told a lie?

"I have sent for the police inspector," continued her ladyship, "and if he can find that anyone has hurt poor Tommy, I will show them no mercy, would you, Mr. Slapkins?"

I bowed feebly—my mind was too distraughted to permit me to speak.

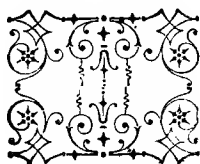
At this moment there came a scratching at the room door, and then there arose a howl which in its insolent assurance seemed familiar to my ears—then more scratching. A foreboding of ill caused a cold perspiration to start out on my brow.

"Bless me!" cried Lord Neversham, "what dog can that be?" and he opened the door to investigate.

There—and this is no fiction—was the satanic *Don*, who had tracked my steps, and now advanced into the room. There he was, and *not he alone*. He bore in his mouth the *carcase of that yellow cat*, and as Lord Neversham and the rest fell back in

astonishment before him. he singled out me, and coming on with a sort of proud calmness, laid it at my feet while I sat spellbound.

“Oh!” screamed Lady Neversham, “that is my Tommy!”



CHAPTER VII.

Nuntiat hostem

Cura canam, furesque procul latratibus arcet.

I BELIEVE that to a man of nervous temperament like myself a really frightful situation is better than a moderately difficult one. The latter merely calls into play the weak points of the character with an effect completely demoralizing, while the former by going further crashes through and paralyzes all weakness, so that a supernatural calm results, and not unfrequently a most unexpected presence of mind.

So it was with me as I sat in the drawing-room of Bunkum Park: the fell pointer hound Don before me; the earthy and blood-stained corpse of the cat at my feet; turmoil and confusion all around me; hysterics of ladies, especially of Lady Neversham, not unmingled with objurgations on the truculent brute who had as she thought slain "Tommy," and come to glory in his crime; interjections and mina-

tory exclamations from male voices; and even laughter, most strangely out of place as it seemed, from Mr. James Bunkum, the younger son of the house. Everyone, if I recollect aright, was standing up, save me; and every one was looking enquiringly and, in the first pang of conscious guilt, I thought suspiciously at me. But, as I have said, the very horror of the catastrophe recalled me to myself, and my swift mind weighed the pros and cons of the position in the few dread moments of noisy confusion.

First I thought to repudiate the dog altogether—deny all knowledge of him in fact; but then I had been seen in his company, and a lie such as that might by chance means be discovered to be untrue. Besides, the creature, despicable though his actions had as yet been, had been purchased by me for a specific purpose, and I could see from the temper of those who stood around that unless I claimed him as my own they would undoubtedly have his blood. No, I must save Don, if not from pecuniary, at least from humane motives, for I knew that the accusation against him that he had wantonly slain the cat was false, though he certainly had contributed in a large measure to the death. Should I boldly confess all?

No, I durst not; especially after the lies I had told Lady Neversham. At last—and that was very quickly—I concluded that I would own the dog was mine, but defend him against the charge of cat-worrying—nay, rather claim praise for him as a skilful and intelligent detective—and as for myself, a moment's reflection sufficed to show me that I should not be suspected. Consequently I boldly declared, "You may be quite sure, Lady Neversham, that my dog—for this is my dog—never hurt the cat. I left orders that he was to be released for an evening run, when I make no doubt he has found the poor animal where its dastardly murderer had left it, and then the dog has, in his desire to bring the crime to light, brought the body on here, where his unerring instinct told him I was."

"Is it possible?" said Lady Neversham, and the Hon. James Bunkum whistled, as it seemed to me, in the excess of his admiration.

Some there were who doubted the probability of my story, but Lord Neversham himself set matters at rest, for he had meanwhile been carefully examining the defunct Tommy, and now pronounced that he had been shot.

"And what is more," continued his lordship, "it seems to me he has been buried, to judge from the quantity of earth in his fur; and then look at the dog's nose and face. Oh! he has evidently had to dig him up."

"Poor, poor Tommy!" sighed the ladies, generally.

"Well, I propose that Tommy be removed and reburied," interposed the heartless James, with most unbecoming levity.

There was some inclination to resent his remark at first, but on second thoughts it was felt that he no doubt suggested the best course under the circumstances to be pursued, therefore a gorgeous footman was instructed to convey the body gently and with care to the gardener, which office the gorgeous one performed with as much disgust and loathing depicted on his countenance as he felt it safe to show. Dinner was announced almost immediately, and Don, who was rapidly attaining the undeserved position of a hero, was hustled off, and I did not see what became of him.

The incident, though it afforded a fertile source for conjecture and conversation, certainly cast a gloom over the party—at least, so I thought. Mayhap my

own connection with the matter, and the wicked lies and deceit of which I—a clergyman—had been guilty thereanent, depressed my spirits, and made me think the evening duller than it really was. In any case it is certain I was very glad when the time came for us to depart, and I helped my wife into our little pony carriage.

“By the way, I wonder what became of my dog,” I exclaimed, suddenly remembering him.

“Oh! he’s been about the kitchen till an hour ago, sir,” said the groom. “Sensible dog, he knows how to look after himself—he’ll have gone home, sire, I dare say.”

“Well, you’ll perhaps send him on should he still be lurking about the premises.”

“Oh! yes, sir,” said the man with a chuckle, “we’ll send him on to you at once.”

So we drove home very silently, and after ascertaining that Don had not yet arrived we went silently to bed. Only one thing my wife said, and that was, “I wish Don was here; I feel quite nervous to-night, a sort of presentiment that something will happen. I wish he was here, he would be a protection.”

“Never fear, darling,” said I bravely, glancing

timorously around the while. I with the new gun can surely protect you," and then I blew out the light and hurried into bed with a sort of instinctive dread that some one would catch me by the leg before I could attain that coign of vantage.

After a while I slept, but my wife's words had induced troubled dreams, or else the dinner had done so. I cannot say which. I dreamed that I was a Bulgarian priest, who had fled to the sanctuary of my church, hotly pursued by swarms of Bashi Bazouks ; they, regardless of the place, were pressing on, and, as is usual in a nightmare, I could stir no farther. Another moment, and I should be impaled on the altar, when there came a vision of Cossacks before my eyes, and in another moment it was I and other Bulgarians who were impaling the Bashi Bazouks. A gentleman called Tartlet meanwhile made copious notes of my performances, but one unkind fate seemed to overshadow him, for I saw in my dream that he went home and stated what he had seen to the Government of his country, but they with one accord denied that his statements were true. More unfortunate he than Cassandra, for he is doomed not to be believed when telling his very experience of

the past, while she merely shared the lot of prophets in general, who rarely receive or merit credence in their dealings with the future.

Crash! and behold! I am defending or attacking the Schipka Pass! How quickly the scene has changed! Crash! bang! smash! Surely that is the voice of Don. Yes, he is barking in the forefront of the battle. Crash! Crash! Bow-ow-o-o-o-o-ow! yap! yap! yow! My blood is up, I will follow the warlike hound into the jaws of death, and with a spring I nerve myself for the mighty effort. I, in fact, spring out of bed and clutch the loaded gun. It may be, it must be, that I am awake; but the sounds still continue with all their terrible significance, and so the illusion—if it be an illusion—is kept up. The shriek of my wife from the bed does but spur me on, for am I not reminded thereby of the stern duty to protect hearth and home from the cruel foe? Down the stairs I rush in nightshirt and in bare-legged haste to the fray; forward—forward into the drawing-room, where the din of battle and the ever-sounding voice of Don declare that the enemy most do congregate. Let no one think this is mere fiction on my part; it will be in the recollection of all how dreams often

seem realities for some while after the dreamer wakes; and here the uproar and turmoil are no mere outcome of my imagination. It is this, and may be, the surfeit of dinner on my sluggish mind, and the tension of the nerves caused by my wife's forebodings before I had gone to sleep, and perchance a glass or two beyond my wont of generous wine—it is all these that carry me on in frenzy, rapt with the indissoluble vision of my dream.

I speak now of the drawing-room, but to me then the scene was, as I have said, the Schipka Pass. That Don should be engaged in the conflict seemed in no way strange, such force have dreams to make fantastic images seem ordinary and common-place! Besides I have been reading of a regimental dog which perhaps may have prepared my mind for the wild conceit.

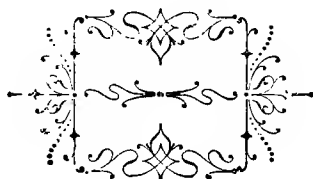
Crash, smash, clang! Yapyowowow, bowowow! And now I am in the thick of it, athirst, as it seems, for bloodshed. Round and round me the tumult swells; louder and still louder the clashing of steel, the battle cry of the hound, and the noise of falling barricades. It is a night attack, and darkness as yet veils the foe, but I press on, tearing down the while

such beams, stockades, and other fortifications as lie in my way, casting them this way and that, scarce feeling the blows that ever and anon strike me more especially on my unprotected legs.

A moonbeam, darting aslant the scene of strife, shows me for a second a flash and a figure. There, there are the foes! and with wild, stern joy I present my gun and fire. Oh! the maddening battle fever that rages in me, as I feel that I am doing execution now! How the noise reverberates, how the crash of falling bastions burst the very ear drum of the night! Again I fire where I know the enemy to be, and, alas, I have no more cartridges! Ha, what is that?

I am hurled to the ground violently, and feel an agonizing pain in my leg—I am wounded, sore—perhaps to death, but even now I remember the adage, “*Dulce est pro patriâ mori.*” I am fainting with exhaustion, but behold there is a flash of light. A figure darts with a candle, and with outcries of astonishment and terror before me. It is my wife! I am in the drawing-room of my own house! Oh, what has happened? Everything is turned this way and that. The beautiful mirror is smashed to atoms, and I—why, I am indeed wounded in the leg, and there is

Don with a tin can tied to his tail! He has, it would seem, burst in through the window, for behold a large plate glass pane is broken. He has fled hither in panic and terror, and has been dashing in frenzy about the room, until, having encountered me and become entangled among my legs, he has fiercely bitten me in his mad and desperate fear. The furniture, the china, everything seems broken, and doubtless it was at my own reflection in the mirror that I had fired my gun. Don is now crouching exhausted and trembling in a corner, while my wife gazes at me in blank amazement.



CHAPTER VIII.

“Here’s sport indeed.”

IT may well be wondered how I succeeded in explaining my position as described in the last chapter, myself undraped save by an all too short nightshirt, a discharged gun in my hand—the furniture, china, and mirrors broken and in horrible confusion, and the panicstricken hound grovelling in a corner with the tin can still attached to his tail.

I really don’t know myself how I explained it ; the servants had fortunately been too much alarmed to come downstairs, but were shrieking and fainting in their own apartment ; and my wife at length taking the view that I had “looked on the wine when it was red” to such a purpose that I had in fact become afflicted by a drunken conceit, I did not strive to argue the question with her, for, as she said, “If you are not drunk, Joseph, you must be mad”—and the very idea of being mad filled me with horror of private lunatic asylums.

So I bestirred myself in the matter of Don to get him freed from his encumbrance if possible, and even then some skeleton as it were of a ghastly legal joke flitted through my mind as to freedom from encumbrances in connection with estates *tail*, cutting off the (en)*tail*, &c., &c. Such a fancy was of course wholly despicable, in so far as it pretended to wit, but I mention it as an instance of the peculiar constitution of the human mind that at such a time could be capable of such a diversion.

The fear of the dog was so great that it was long before he would permit me to touch him. He snapped fiercely at me when I approached, and seemed to regard me as the enemy who had done this, but by degrees the calm and soothing voices of my wife and myself reassured him, and I was able to cut the string which connected his caudal appendage with the pot, pan, cauldron, or kettle which inhuman monsters had appended further thereto.

Thus released, he quickly recovered himself, and consented to be shut into the kitchen for the night, where the fatigue he had undergone made him sleep soundly, I was thankful to say.

Not to dwell further on this humiliating incident,

I will go on to describe how, the 12th of August being now at hand, I had arranged to be among the number of those who purposed to attack the grouse on Saltersgate Moor, near Whitby, upon that day. I do not pretend to know by what right so many people did this thing, but it certainly was so in those days that shooting on Saltersgate Moor was to be had for the asking, and it did not seem to matter very much whom you asked, inasmuch as, so far as I could gather, some twenty or thirty people were able to give the necessary permission.

I myself went to stay at the little village of Sleights, so as to be within driving distance of the scene of action, and I had made arrangements with one Mr. Mead, a farmer, to take me with him in his dog-cart as he drove thither. He informed me that it would be absolutely necessary for us to be there by half-past three in the morning, so as to commence shooting at the earliest possible opportunity, otherwise we should be forestalled at all points, and probably fail to find a single bird. I was quite willing to start as early as he liked, and it was therefore agreed that he should call for me at two a.m., when I promised that Don and I would be in readiness.

I had most carefully prepared my bag of cartridges, my gun, and all accoutrements. Don had been most discreetly fed and exercised, so that his condition appeared better than it had been, and his breathing was certainly less stertorous. As for a game-bag, Mead said that his man would carry that, and so there was no more to think of, except as to whether it would be well to go to bed at all or not overnight.

I did not like to trust any one to wake me, but as I happened to have an alarum with me, I concluded to trust to it, and so setting it to one o'clock, I essayed to snatch a few hours of rest.

Breakfast had been laid out for me overnight, and when I was startled from what seemed but a momentary period of repose by the noise of the alarum I certainly felt that I should have been better advised had I not gone to bed at all. Nevertheless, there was nothing for it but to get up, light the candle, which added to the uncomfortable aspect of the darkness, and with a somewhat dry, or, what I have heard styled "chippy," sensation, to commence the task of equipping myself for the fray. There was my cold bath, and very untempting it seemed; nevertheless, I resolutely entered it; and so far as

that part of my experience goes, I can only say "don't" to any who may contemplate following my example, and laving their manly limbs at such an hour. I felt cold, shaky, and unrefreshed, as I went downstairs, where I found that the little lodging-house slave-of-all-work was already bestirring herself and boiling the kettle to make me tea.

The tea and a little food certainly improved me, but I shivered as I looked out into the night, and then stepped gingerly forth to fetch Don from the outhouse where he resided. The wind blew chill, and there was a slight drizzling rain, so I was glad to get back into the house with the liberated hound, who, when he saw my gun, became so boisterous in his deportment that I was constrained to reprimand him sharply for fear he should arouse the whole household, and do some serious damage to the crockery. Then I sat down at one side of the kitchen fire, and the little slave, half dead with sleep, bestowed herself upon a stool in a corner. Don became pensive, and blinked at the flickering flames. I was half nodding off to sleep, I verily believe, when suddenly the sound of wheels aroused me, and I started up as I heard them stop opposite the house. Then there came a pro-

longed shout, "Yo-ho-hup!" and I knew that Mead had arrived, so I hurried to the door, called out "All right," and, quickly collecting my gun, great-coat, and ammunition, summoned the hound with a gentle blast of my new dog-whistle, and so sallied forth.

"Good morning, sir," said Mead, with what seemed to me revolting heartiness—for he did not mean it by way of joke—"we're just in nice time. Here, John, get down and help to put Mr. Slapkins' dog into the trap; I daresay he and old Ponto won't quarrel." And in a very brief space I saw the adipose form of Don raised in the stalwart arms of Mead's man John, and deposited in the dog-cart, whence at once arose irritable and ominous expostulations on the part of Ponto, the occupant hitherto, and deep minatory grumblings from my hound, who appeared determined to resent such an uncourteous reception. However, a few somewhat rough objurgations addressed by John to the pair served to quiet them, but it appeared to me that on the side of Mead's dog there had been a lamentable want of that good feeling which ought always to be exercised towards strangers.

I took my seat alongside Mead, and with John behind we started on our way. It was quite dark, and

for my part I was not inclined for conversation, but my companion rattled on about the moor and his previous experiences of it, the birds and the dogs, and the men that had been shot there. "For," said he, "it gets like the battle of Waterloo after an hour or two, when people have drawn up from all sides."

The idea of this seemed hardly pleasant to me, but I was laboriously engaged walking up Blue Bank, which necessitated our getting down at a very early period of the drive, and plodding away on foot for most of a mile before we reached the top; and the effort thus entailed on me left little room for much deliberation. Arrived on level ground, we once more took our seats, fastened down the apron, and started comfortably.

"He's a rare young horse, this," said Mead, "I've only driven him twice before, and he goes as steady as an old one."

"Indeed?" replied I, for lack of any other answer.

There was silence for a few moments. We were driving through a regular Scotch mist, which filled the eyes with cold water in a manner that to me was very remarkable. The lamps glared dimly through it,

and the situation was, in my opinion, suggestive of bronchitis rather than pleasure.

At that moment the one hound took umbrage at some word or deed of the other, or rather, I fancy, a jolt of the vehicle shook them both together so that they mutually regarded themselves as having been insulted, and without more they fell to and fought in deadly wise under the seat and among our legs. The snarling, barking, swearing, struggling, snapping, and gnashing was so frightful that there is small wonder that our horse bolted in very panic, and away we went fast and furious in the mist and darkness, while the combat of the hounds raged in perilous proximity to our shrinking calves.

We had infallibly been bitten, but that another fate was in store for us. The horse got off the road, it being impossible to see our way at the rate we were going, and in a very few moments a bump, as we crossed some "grip" or hollow, caused Mr. Mead to fly sidelong from the vehicle still retaining a sitting posture, while I, on whom the force of the excellent springs seemed to have had more effect, was propelled high into the air—also to the right—and turning gradually over like an arrow which, when shot upwards

after it has attained to its highest point, reverses its progress and comes headlong to the earth, like nothing else than such an arrow, and, so far as I can see, for no other reason, I descended head downwards, and had time even then to think how much harder my luck was than that of Mead, whom I saw subsiding comfortably on the grass in a manner not likely to injure any delicate part of his organization.

However, fortune to some extent befriended me also, for the ground whereon I fell was soft and quaggy. I had clasped my arms over my head for some kind of protection, and on the whole, therefore, I suffered wonderfully little damage, though I penetrated to some depth through the yielding surface of my landing-place. Mead soon extricated me, and I was nothing the worse save for a coating of mire all over my face and head. Meanwhile John, holding on like grim death to the back seat of the dog-cart, had been so taken up by his own position that he never knew we had gone until the horse some hundred yards farther on plunged knee-deep in the treacherous ground and fell. In consequence of this John performed a back somersault away over the horse's head, and the hostile hounds were also flung out over the

splashboard, which caused them to cease their bloody battle for the time being.

It was quite a marvel that no damage of any kind seemed to have been done to man, beast, or vehicle. Ponto and Don indeed presented a gory appearance, but that was the result of their battle. The horse got on his legs again after a little difficulty, and though at first much alarmed, soon grew quiet as we led him back to the road when we had gathered up the guns and other scattered paraphernalia. The pointers still showing signs of enmity, we decided to put Ponto into the trap, and make Don run, so that they might be effectually separated. Once more then we took our seats, congratulating ourselves on our lucky escape, I myself suffering only from a hopeless desire to wash the plastering mud from my hair and face.

But not even thus were we destined to arrive in peace at the moor, for before we had gone another half mile the fatal Don, whether from exhaustion resulting from the fight and the unwonted toil of running on the road, or from negligence, or from sheer malice and evil design, got his unwieldy carcase right among the horse's legs, which so alarmed

the animal that it kicked fiercely. There was a crack and a deflection of the dog-cart on my side.

"Jump out, sir," cried Mead, as he pulled up short, "the shaft's broke!"

So it proved, but the pointer hound who had led to this fresh disaster was totally uninjured, and surveyed us with maddening complacency. I fear there were words used which it would not become me to repeat, and I am not sure that some of them did not fall from my lips. But we speedily addressed ourselves to the task of repairing the breakage, and as John had brought a long cord with him which he had intended to attach to Ponto should the dog prove uncontrollable in his work, we were enabled to splice the shaft together again after a clumsy and precarious fashion; and when this, after considerable delay, was done, we started once more, making Ponto run this time while Don rode.

At last, in the grey misty light of dawn, we reached our destination, and Mead and I got down at the boundary of the moor, while John went and put the horse up somewhere hard by. Our guns, cartridges, and everything else were duly in order, and all was ready for a start—except that there was hardly sufficient

light as yet. "We are in plenty of time after all," said Mead. It was a quarter to four o'clock. No one else seemed to be in the vicinity, and I felt as if about to take part in a night attack on some enemy. The feud between Don and Ponto now began to break out again, and renewed strife was imminent for they clearly availed themselves of the opportunity, when we were thus waiting, to reflect on their respective wrongs. At last, in spite of the abusive threats of John, they could be no longer restrained, and were falling to in all fury, so that Mead exclaimed,

"It's no use, Mr. Slapkins. These dogs 'll never agree, and they'll frighten all the birds off the place. We must go different ways, and each take his own dog." And suiting the action to the word, before I had time to ask for directions as to my course, he beat the dogs asunder, and hurried away, leading Ponto by the ear, and I was left alone with Don.

After a little reflection, I decided to make the best of it, and as it was now much lighter, I stepped off on to the moor in quest of grouse. The hound, somewhat to my annoyance, neglected to "range" as I desired him. Indeed, he appeared very averse to travelling among the heather, and in spite of my

positive commands, he would insist on following abjectly at my heels. Perhaps the rough or prickly growth through which we walked was painful to his fat, bladder-like body. Perhaps he was exhausted with his run ; perhaps faint with his fight. Whatever the reason, certain it is that he absolutely declined to comport himself with that aptitude for the chase which his manner in the fields near my home had led me to expect.

However, I had small time to think of this, for I heard a shot in the distance, and presently I observed a dark object speeding swiftly through the air right towards me. "Whatever it be," thought I, "I will essay its destruction." I had just descended a gentle slope, at the foot of which a streamlet ran. and the bird was coming from the rising ground on the opposite side across the little valley. To me then, where I stood, the feathered fowl rose higher and higher as it advanced, inasmuch as it was making for the top of the bank behind me ; but I determined to give fire, and directed my piece eagerly and yet cunningly towards it as it came on in its wind-swift flight.

I have pulled the trigger.

For a moment I fear that I have failed, as the bird passes on high over my head, but as I turn hurriedly round, I see, to my inexpressible joy, that it is in reality hurtling to the ground, having been carried so far by the momentum of its speed.

I run to it, accompanied by Don. It is indeed a grouse, and quite dead!

I take it up with trembling hands, admire its plumage, and place it with some difficulty in one of my pockets, for John has gone with Mead, and has taken the bag; and just as I have reloaded my gun, behold there is another dark flitting bird crossing me some thirty yards off, with a strange cackling noise. I fire, and it falls.

Exultation now takes hold of me at my exploits, and Don is aroused to enthusiasm, for he runs forward to secure the slain, and I follow him as quickly as I can. The excited hound has seized the bird, and I cry loudly, "Drop it, you brute," and other similar expressions; but he does not drop it, and to my horror and indignation, after gazing at me in a dull, mute-like fashion as I run towards him, and seeming as it were to crush the quarry in his massive jaws, he turns away and deliberately gallops off with his prey,

and for all my admonitory clamour, and frequent blasts on my whistle, he *is gone, the grouse with him!* I felt more hurt than angered at the conduct of the hound ; that he should thus have repaid my kindness was indeed grievous, and I walked on in vain quest of him, much musing on the morals of the brute creation. I had no more sport, for now the reports of firearms kept coming from all sides. Birds, ever and anon, flitted by ; but though it was now quite light, I failed in my endeavours to strike them, except in one instance, where the grouse dropped to my discharge, but, on my rushing in to secure it, arose again as if nothing had happened, and with a cackle, as it seemed, of derision, sped away as if nothing had happened, leaving me too much astonished to try the effect of another barrel at it.

The fusillading all around increased more and more, and I cannot but think there must have been some peril to the numerous sportsmen who thronged the moor. I myself put several pellets through the crown of a gentleman's hat which, rising just over the brow of a hill, I mistook for a bird ; and I had much ado to pacify him, for his rage and language were alike fearful. To me, however, no disaster

happened, and I at length encountered Mr. Mead, who had acquired three brace of birds, and said that as no more good could now be done we might perhaps better be journeying off home.

I had been carrying my gun at full cock, as I found great difficulty in firing with sufficient rapidity if I did not do so; and I now handed it to John, nor did I think any more about it. Don, we decided, had probably gone back to Sleights; at any rate, it was no use looking for him.

We consumed the food which we had brought, likewise the drink—for it was now midday -- and then the horse being harnessed, we set off on our return journey—Mead and I in the front as before, and John behind. The guns were placed, muzzle upwards, between Mead and myself.

We had not driven a hundred yards when one of the guns *discharged itself*. I felt an awful shock at the side of my head, and put up my hand to ascertain how I was wounded, while from behind the voice of John lustily proclaimed, “Oh! I’m shot! I’m shot!”



CHAPTER IX.

“Come out, ’t is now September.”

JOHN was not shot, neither was I. In my case the concussion caused by the discharge so near my ear had at first produced a sensation similar to that of a heavy blow, and I had, therefore, some cause for my alarm. John, however, was seated well out of harm’s way, and his outcry was simply the result of fear.

The horse, fortunately, remained quite steady, otherwise the other barrel might also have discharged itself. As it was, Mead was able to possess himself of my gun, and to extract the remaining cartridge.

“That will be a warning, sir,” said he, “never to leave the cartridges in your gun.”

“But I thought John would have taken them out,” gasped I, still awestricken at the terrible danger we had almost miraculously escaped.

“Never trust anybody to do that, sir ; always do it yourself.”

This advice of Mead, which was given quietly, and without any signs of anger such as might have been expected under the circumstances, made a deep impression on me, and I resolved never to forget it ; nor do I think my readers will act amiss if they also lay it to heart.

It was only by the merest chance—or say rather by an interposition of Providence—that the explosion of the weapon had not hurt either of us. It had happened at the moment to be pointing directly upwards between our heads. Had it been swayed to one side or the other, as might so easily have been the case,—I tremble to think on what the consequences might have been.

Yet, such is the levity of human nature, we began to talk ere long just as if nothing had happened, and to discuss the possibility of finding Don again. In my inmost heart I was conscious that to see him no more would be very far from grievous to me ; nevertheless for decency’s sake I felt it necessary to make some show of solicitude in respect of him ; and before we reached Sleights, which we did with-

out further accident, we had arranged that Don was to be cried by the bellman round Whitby, and was also to be advertised for in the local paper.

I parted from Mr. Mead with feelings of kindness and respect, and even Ponto seemed to have a certain dewlapped dignity about him, as, with his pendulous lips, and the loose skin hanging about his throat, he sat up, and looked almost amicably at me from the back of the dog-cart while he was driven away.

I must hurry over the final proceedings anent Don. The advertisement with one pound reward duly appeared, and the Whitby bellman exercised his very remarkable powers in calling the attention of all who were within hearing to my loss, but it was of no avail. Many men, it is true, came to Sleights—for I had incautiously given my address—accompanied by all sorts and conditions of dogs, alleging that they felt sure from the description that “this ’ere” was my lost hound; and, on being told that it was not, called attention to the expense and trouble they had been at in coming to me, and the day’s work lost, &c., &c., so that I felt obliged to reimburse them.

In this way I spent much money; but as for Don,

I never saw him more; and calmly reflecting on his conduct during the brief space in which I possessed him, I cannot but feel that he left his master for his master's good.

One or two more days I had on Saltersgate Moor—decidedly more enjoyable than the first—but I by no means succeeded in striking the grouse that I came across with the accuracy that I had anticipated. Nevertheless—and here again I was guilty of deceit—I *purchased* a number of birds at Whitby, which I sent home to my wife and also to my friends, so that it should appear that my success in the chase had been sufficiently marked. Then, as September drew nigh, and it also became necessary for me to attend to my parish duties, I departed from Sleights' and ere long was engaged in pursuit of the unsuspecting partridges, whose whereabouts I was able by attentive observation to detect even though unaided by the keen scent of the vanished hound. A variety of considerations, however, troubled me in my endeavours to succeed as a partridge-hunter. Firstly, I experienced the utmost difficulty in retaining anything approaching to presence of mind when a large flock of the birds rose up close by me. On such

occasions I became overpowered by an irresistible inclination to discharge my piece, insomuch that I never could bring myself to take note of any particular bird at which to aim before I got it discharged.

Thus, though I could make shift to fire into the midst of the flock, I failed as a rule to bring any one of the number to the ground. Again, if a single bird sprang up close at my feet, I found that, although I could direct my aim with greater ease, I nevertheless could not restrain myself from pulling trigger very rapidly, and the partridge would in consequence fall at a distance of not more than ten yards away. In such cases, I observed that it was in an unsuitable state for cooking; and my wife complained greatly of the shattered condition of the game, or fragments of game, which I from time to time brought home.

"My dear," I reasoned, "it is but a proof of the excellence of my new gun, for which you ought rather to be pleased."

"But, Joseph," said she, "the grouse you sent home from Sleights were quite different."

"Ah, my love! the grouse is a harder plumaged bird than the partridge, and consequently my excellent fowling-piece did not harm them so much."

Thus did one deceit lead to another, for, as I have explained, those grouse had been *bought* by me, and were, of course, the trophies of another's skill.

But there was yet another difficulty which caused me great annoyance, and that was the habit the birds had of evading me when by any chance I brought them to the ground not wholly dead. In such cases I was invariably baffled by them, and spent many hours in fruitless quests. I happened to mention this to Mr. Lamb, the rector of a neighbouring parish, and he, being much given to country pursuits, was at once able to advise me.

"Oh!" said he, "you should have a retriever;" and on my inquiring further from him, he informed me that one Jabez Bunyan, an old Waterloo veteran whom he knew, had a young dog for sale, which, though but partly broken as yet, would very possibly suit me, and might be bought cheap.

Accordingly, I invited Mr. Lamb to come and shoot with me and stay the night, and to arrange with Bunyan to bring the dog over on trial.

Mr. Lamb was a clergyman of an old school, being somewhat, as I believe, devoted to the drinking of port, and in addition to being a keen and accom-

plished marksman, was even given to frequenting the hunting-field. Nay, it was alleged that he was not wholly inexperienced in the matter of race-courses. His language was somewhat free, and his clothing was scarcely orthodox in my view of clerical proprieties. Yet in many ways I felt drawn towards him.

On the appointed morning he arrived with Bunyan, an aged and toothless man, who led in a string the dog Sweep, a large black curly-coated creature, whose head and countenance seemed to me heavy and morose.

I inspected the animal carefully, and was assured by Bunyan that he would carry an egg without breaking it, which might or might not be a desirable accomplishment, for anything I knew; and in due time we started on our trial trip. We walked for some while without finding game, but at last a single bird flew up in a pasture field at a very considerable distance away from us. I was surprised to see Mr. Lamb shoot his gun at it, and still more surprised to see it fall, as I did not think the pellets would have struck it effectually at such a distance; but, after all, it had been but partially disabled, for as we were

looking, it commenced to run rapidly away up the field. At this, Mr. Lamb, who was elated with his success, called out to Bunyan in great excitement,

“Now, then, let that dog go.”

This Bunyan was very fain to do, as he was only with the greatest difficulty restraining the impetuous animal, which had seen the partridge drop, and was exceedingly desirous to go after it. When slipped in pursuit of the game, the dog sped along with eager barks, and Bunyan hobbled on after him at the best pace his aged legs could attain to.

“Fancy a retriever giving tongue like that!” said Mr. Lamb, in a somewhat indignant tone, as he stood by me watching the chase.

“I never heard of such a thing,” replied I, which was perfectly true, for I did not in the remotest degree understand what he meant.

“Ah! you brute!” now roared out my friend, in a manner that almost startled me. “Get to him quick, Bunyan; d—n him, *he’s going to eat it!*”

My astonishment at the vigour of Mr. Lamb’s utterances rapidly vanished in my own feelings of anger and excitement, as I observed Sweep, having captured his prey, deliberately proceed, as it seemed,

to chew and masticate it, instead of taking it to Bunyan lightly and delicately, as I had been led to suppose he would do.

"Yah ! drop it, will yer ?" shouted Bunyan, making the best of his way towards the peccant hound.

"Drop," cried I, catching at the word which I remembered to have been one of the prescribed commands to be addressed to Don.

"Catch hold of him, man," yelled Mr. Lamb in a perfect frenzy. "Lay into him, or he'll swallow it."

These words were, of course, addressed to Bunyan, who had just seized the dog and was essaying to rescue the remains of the partridge from his deadly gripe. The animal remained obstinately resolute, and continued to partake of the bird in spite of the feeble blows which his aged master, in accordance with Mr. Lamb's desire, bestowed upon him. We were now hurrying up, and Mr. Lamb, seeing that Bunyan's efforts were hitherto fruitless, grew purple with anger, and gave vent to these extraordinary and outrageous words :

"D—n him, bite his tail !"

I felt that I should be lamentably wanting in moral courage if I did not object to this, and so I exclaimed,

“My dear Lamb, you forget yourself!”

“Yes, of course ; what a fool I am !” answered he. “I might have remembered the old devil hasn’t any teeth !”

I felt that after this it would be useless to explain that my remark had had a very different object ; and besides, we were now upon the scene of action, where our united efforts succeeded in overcoming the stubborn resistance of the retriever hound, and depositing the mangled corse of the partridge—or what remained of it—in the bag.

I have since ascertained that to bite the tail is one of the methods—though not an efficacious one—for making a fighting dog relax his hold on his enemy ; but it seems passing strange to me that a direction of the kind should have come so trippingly on the tongue of a clergyman respecting whom it would be slanderous to allege that he was experienced in the technicalities of dog-fighting.

The retriever—very falsely so called—had escaped from us while we were bestowing the bird in the bag, and our attention was speedily recalled to him by his incontinently pursuing a hare which had been slumbering hard by, and now at length awoke and fled

away. In spite of all our cries and admonitions, the uncontrollable hound urged on the chase, and the quarry cantered lightly and easily before him into the best and largest turnip-field on the farm. Once there, the dog was soon at fault, so far as that particular hare was concerned, but nevertheless he went galloping rampantly around, and quickly put up some partridges, the which, as they flew at a low elevation across the field, he chased with barking clamour. And now he started another bird, and now another—now a whole lot, and more still, as he raged hither and thither in his wild career. Bunyan had shouted and objurgated until his voice was gone; I blew upon my whistle till I was constrained to cease for fear of breaking a blood-vessel ; and Mr. Lamb—well, perhaps it were better that I should not record the particulars of his remarks. Their tenor was certainly blasphemous, but then, after all, the provocation was great.

Sweep having effectually dispersed the whole of the feathered fowl from the field, at length thought fit to return, and being secured by the rope, was treated to the severest castigation his owner could inflict. But his countenance seemed to me wholly unyielding.

"Surely," said I, "this is an instance of *dogged* determination."

We passed on now silently, save for the garrulous explanations of Bunyan, who declared he'd "never seed the dog do such'n a thing before," and was confident he would not do so again.

"He certainly would not if he were mine," muttered Mr. Lamb.

"How would' you prevent him?" inquired I.

"*With that rope*," and Mr. Lamb placed his finger near his jugular vein with a significant gesture.

I presumed that he alluded to some adroit method—known to himself—by which the dog might be kept in check by the cord, and so I answered, "Well, if I buy him, I must get you to officiate."

At this he laughed heartily, and I was fain to join him, though I did not see in what respect my observation had been so humorous.

But in the course of an hour or so we began to get on better. Sweep had been released no more, and we had, in consequence, found the birds both abundant and tolerably tame, insomuch that they allowed us to come within shooting distance on several occasions. Mr. Lamb and I more than once each fired both

barrels into the midst of a flying flock, and the victims generally fell. I presume that we must both have aimed at the same birds—though, for my own part, I was not very conscious of having taken any aim at all, or it might be of course that my companion had missed.

My wife drove the pony-carriage to meet us with an excellent little lunch, and it was really most agreeable sitting behind a hedge and discussing it. There was some good old ale, and also some rare brown sherry, of which the animated society of Mr. Lamb caused me to drink more freely than was my wont; and the beauty of the scene, the chastened warmth of the autumn sun, the distant crowing of the partridges one to the other, and the sense of bodily comfort, elevated and distended my mind in the most pleasing manner. Nevertheless, when it was time again to be moving, I certainly did not feel so fit for the task as before, nor so confident of the accuracy of my aim.

My wife drove along on the road, whence she could observe our movements for a while, and with her thus looking on we entered a luxuriant turnip-field. Jabez Bunyan with the dog was walking in the midst, Mr.

Lamb and I flanking him on either side ; thus we proceeded to traverse the ground.

“Mark here!” cried Bunyan suddenly, in a manner that well-nigh caused me to explode my gun into the air with the start I received ; and in good truth a hare had leaped up in front of him, and was rushing across my path, hotly pursued by the hound, which had burst from Bunyan’s weakly hold.

“Now,” thought I, “my wife shall see my prowess” --and aiming full at the hare, I fired. It passed on seemingly unhurt ; but the dog Sweep plunged upon his head, turned over and over, and lay motionless. I stood aghast at what I had done, but presently there came the voice of Mr. Lamb.

“I don’t wonder a bit at your doing it, Slapkins. I feel sure I should have done the same thing myself had I been in your place ; for of all aggravating and useless brutes that I ever saw, that was the worst.”

“Was ?” repeated I, faintly.

“Yes, he’s dead enough, depend on it. You took good care of that. I saw the way you aimed, just about a yard in front of his head, to allow for the speed he was going, and I knew you meant business.”

“But it was the hare I shot at.”

“Ha! ha! ha! don’t think to deceive me in that way. My good fellow, I’m not *blaming* you for killing the dog: quite the contrary; but there was no mistake about your intention. I never saw anything more deliberately done in my life. I am very glad of it: you have rid the world of a monster.”

So, finding that I actually obtained credit in his eyes for the performance, I ceased to affirm that it was an accident, and complacently took to myself his praise for my skilful marksmanship. Bunyan, however, was not equally jubilant. He mourned over the hound, and seemed inclined to become abusive, but ceased when I told him I would readily give him the value of the animal, which by the way was subsequently agreed on at thirty shillings.

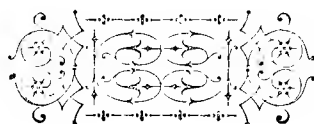
My wife had been much distressed at the proceedings, as she watched from the road, and we were obliged to go and explain to her the reason of what I had done.

“I could not have believed, Joseph,” said she, “that you would have been so cruel”—and it was in vain that Mr. Lamb held forth on the heinous character of the deceased hound—“the poor thing knew no better,” said she, and drove away with a reproachful glance at

me. I felt that I had sunk in her estimation, and acquired a reputation for ferocious barbarity.

After all, we had some fair sport during the afternoon, and slew a not inconsiderable quantity of game, though several birds escaped us owing to our lack of a dog. Dinner and exceptional potations of champagne quite restored the general equanimity, and as I sat thereafter consuming old port—of which I possessed a fair store, though I seldom touched it—I concluded that we had spent a most joyous day, and that Mr. Lamb was the most pleasant person of my acquaintance.

Eventually, arm-in-arm, we proceeded up the stairs to our rest; but I found next morning that I had sunk to sleep, without removing my clothes, upon the floor of my dressing-room—so great had been the effect of the fresh air and exercise.



CHAPTER X.

“——Last scene of all
That ends this strange eventful history.”

TIME passed on, and I was sued in the county court by the owner of the prize rabbits which Don had worried during his original journey by rail to me. The railway company were also made defendants, and several nice points arose as between me and them. It was urged that they were liable for the loss of the rabbits, because they were bound to protect them against the hound as against everything else except the act of God and the Queen's enemies. This seemed clear enough, but it was by no means equally clear that I was not the person ultimately liable; for, said the company, though they were obliged no doubt to bestow proper attention on the animals committed to their charge, they could not be held responsible for the vicious and unnatural acts of a dog like Don. I maintained that his act was

neither vicious nor unnatural, and they might have known what to expect when they placed him near rabbits.

Then arose a question as to whether it was a natural or unnatural act on the part of a pointer to worry tame rabbits. If natural, the company ought to have been on their guard against Don; if unnatural, then they could not be expected to know his propensity, and I should have to pay for it.

The county court judge decided against me.

"I know, Mr. Slapkins," said he, "that you are too good a sportsman to seriously maintain that it is the habit of pointers to worry rabbits. I must give the plaintiff judgment, and you will have to pay his costs and those of the railway company."

Thus I had to pay some fifteen pounds in all for the vanished pleasures of the departed Don, and it was with but a bad grace that I did it, when I reflected on the brief career of the hound while he was in my possession—the numerous ills he had wrought me, and now this crowning act of pecuniary damage, whereby I was mulcted in a sum three times as large as what Don himself had cost.

Then there were long accounts in all papers, with

various objectionable headings—such as “Extraordinary Action against a Clergyman;” “A Clergyman sued for Worrying tame Rabbits;” “A Vicar’s Dog in the County Court;” and, finally the *Police News* got hold of some garbled version of the story, and produced a terrible illustration of a clerical person—presumably myself—clad in very long black coat and extreme High Church hat, hounding on a vast shaggy dog at a number of lop-eared rabbits, while the usual stock figures to represent horror, dismay, and astonishment were grouped in the background. This picture was entitled, “Horrible Cruelty to Rabbits by a Clergyman.”

All this was most annoying at the time, but it was soon forgotten; and I must say that I had, from severe experience, become somewhat callous to misrepresentation and aspersion. I rejoiced to think that Don was gone, for I felt in a measure safe, so far as the future was concerned; and I turned myself once more to the sport of shooting so that I might effectually forget my troubles. Very opportunely arrived just then an invitation from Lord Neversham to shoot pheasants, and I felt quite a glow of satisfaction as I sat down to write accepting it. I went over expressly

to see Mr. Lamb on the subject, for I thought he might give me many useful hints, and I was surprised when he told me that I ought to have another gun with some one to load for me. He kindly offered to lend me his weapon for the day, and advised me to charter Bunyan to accompany me; but I felt that I should be more at home with Jonas Pegrum, so, on my return home, I spent some time in teaching that somewhat idle person this new form of work.

To my surprise he took most readily to it; but subsequent events led me to the conclusion that he had a foreknowledge of the fact that there is usually a good supply of drink for the men at these shooting parties, and, therefore, alone he seized the opportunity with avidity. I carefully furbished both the guns, and my wife trimmed up my garments, so that nothing might be wanting. Many cartridges were loaded, and everything that I could think of was prepared some days before the appointed time.

It came at last, and in some excitement I drove with Pegrum to Bunkum Park, where I arrived early, but the rest of the party were soon assembled. They were strangely assorted, and I conceived that there must have been a political purpose in the presence of

some of them, such for instance—Sir William Wormwood Marsport, Mr. Grabyourshare, the Right Hon. John Wright, Mr. Cadlaw, and several others, whom I confess I was surprised, and not exactly pleased, to see. On the other hand, however, Lord Neversham received me most kindly, as did Mr. James Bunkum and his cousin Mr. Gerald, and I certainly felt that with them I was in more congenial society.

The motley company was soon under weigh, escorted by the keepers, and before long we were being disposed in various suitable localities around a cover that lay near the house. I myself was sent on to the extreme end of the plantation, where I was told I should have any amount of shooting ; but I was not to kill hen birds—a most perplexing injunction, I thought, for I much doubted my capacity to distinguish between the sexes while the creatures were on the wing. Sir William Marsport, by his own wish, went into the wood with the beaters, as he had a peculiar fancy for killing hares and rabbits. Mr. Wright looked on the whole rather ashamed of himself and inclined to abandon his weapon, but upon second thoughts seemed inclined to go through with the business, and stood resolutely awaiting what might chance. He

reminded one greatly of Mr. Tracy Tupman, such as my mind's eye has fancied him in the immortal shooting party of "Pickwick." Mr. Cadlaw indulged in abstruse and scientific discourse on projectiles, and laid down various theories by which the shooter should be guided. I could not but be struck by his discourse—much though I abhorred the man—and I said to him,

"Your philosophy has guided you to excellent theories in this matter, Mr. Cadlaw; maybe ere the day ends we shall have seen the fruits of it."

I have never ascertained why Mr. Cadlaw turned haughtily away at this, and why Mr. James Bunkum burst into an uncontrolled fit of laughter; but so it was.

This had all happened before I was stationed at the corner I have already mentioned, and where I was now awaiting my prey. All was still for a while, the hoarse breathing of Pegrum alone breaking the silence of the calm November day. Then arose various sounds from the far end of the wood, tappings on tree-trunks, exclamations of "Shoo! Hey up there, hey up!" Then suddenly, "Mark hare forward!"—and a report, doubtless emanating from Sir William

Marsport's deadly weapon—then “Mark” again, and doubly increasing noises with frequent shots. The whole posse, consisting of beaters and shooters, is drawing on, and I hear many “flackerings” of the wings of rising birds—till suddenly one comes flying swiftly towards me. I am somewhat agitated as I fire, and it passes over my head unharmed.

“That was a hen bird, sir,” says Pegrum as he hands me the other gun, and I rejoice that I did not kill it.

Now more and more are coming, for I am in what is termed a warm corner, and I fire fast and furiously. Nor have I time to think about directing my aim aright. Nevertheless I have made one of the gay-plumaged creatures bite the dust, and Pegrum in exploding a gun by accident close past my head strangely enough brings down a beautiful cock that happens to be swooping past. So, after all, I have not done so very badly when the party reach me, for some of them have slain nothing, and Mr. Graybyour-share has greatly irritated the presiding powers by leaving a most favourable corner of the cover just at the critical moment, and going across several fields in pursuit of a flock of tame pigeons which he alleged

were more productive of sport, according to his lights. Mr. Peter Buylands—who was also one of us—had, from motives of economy, declined to discharge his piece; and the rest had done just fairly.

But I will not dwell on this day, for it is not endeared to my recollection, and as I draw near the end of this recital I become gravely serious, and unable to aptly treat the many ludicrous incidents that followed quickly one on another; for instance, the merry sport of Sir Skillyfed Boreson, who induced the Right Hon. John Wright after luncheon to wager with him who could best shoot the other's hat if thrown on high—and of course Sir Skillyfed had the best of it, for Mr. Wright's hat was so excessively broad in the brim that the worthy baronet had no difficulty in striking it with great severity.

Enough of that, however. I had been shooting worse and worse after luncheon, and had once actually irritated Lord Neversham by the futility of my efforts to compass the destruction of the pheasant fowl. Nay, I am not sure that I did not hear an imprecation escape from his lips; and so I became more nervous, and still less capable of holding my piece straight.

The end of all was in this wise: I was imagining

myself apart from the rest, and was making my way through a pretty strong growth of briars and shrubs, when with much noise a gleaming pheasant startled up at my feet. Before it was fairly clear of the ground or had gone five yards I gave fire, and it dropped stone-dead; but alas! my pellets found another billet besides—for I heard a loud and blasphemous yell some twenty yards farther on full in my line of fire. I hurried up, and there was Lord Neversham roaring and stamping with pain and anger. By merciful Providence he had had his back turned towards me, but my shot passing through the thicket had really wounded him severely, and I could only gasp with confusion and dismay, and stammer forth expressions of sorrow.

“Oh! d—n you, sir!” cried his lordship, “you did it on purpose, I know you did. *No one would fire before a bird got above the level of the bushes if he didn’t intend and wish to hit some one else.* You did it on purpose, I tell you. Take your beastly gun home, and yourself with it, and be d——d to you!”

This was all he could say before he was removed, which was very quickly done, and I was left ruminating on the mutability of human fortune. Here was my

patron, my best friend, suddenly become my bitter foe, all through this gun ; and then all my other mishaps through its means flashed before me, and I said to Pegrum, who stood gaping near in a semi-intoxicated state, " Yes, I will take it home, and never bring it forth again."

Pegrum chuckled a low gurgling chuckle, but said never a word, and so we sneaked away to our pony-carriage and departed.

It avails not to tell here of the sensation my shooting of Lord Neversham created, and of the reports concerning it that spread over the country, and to some extent, I suppose, over the world. Sarcastic articles were written concerning sporting clergymen, and my antecedents in connection with the horse Rakeaway were mercilessly brought up. Lord Neversham, I am bound to say, when his passion and anger were over, heaped coals of fire upon my head by writing a most kind letter from his bed—his bed of sickness to which I had brought him—and saying how much he regretted the language he had made use of to me, and hoped that I would pardon it under the circumstances, for he felt sure that I was the last man in the world to have been careless in shooting ;

but no one knew better than himself how accidents were at times unavoidable: he himself felt grieved beyond measure that the pain such an untoward event must have caused me should have been cruelly increased by his thoughtless and insulting observations, &c, &c.

It is not too much to say I actually wept on reading this letter, but was more than ever determined not to tempt fortune with the gun again. Indeed, when Lord Neversham was ordered abroad for the sake of a complete recovery, and the whole family went with him, and Bunkum Park was comparatively deserted, I became subject to strange brooding fits of melancholy, and more than once felt irresistibly impelled to walk forth in the cold moonlight nights, and make my way into the park, there to expatiate hither and thither smoking a cigar—for I had learned the habit of smoking from Mr. Lamb—and thinking gloomily upon my past misfortunes, while I looked forward with foreboding to the future. At such times I would draw near to the house and prowl around, for all the world like some unquiet spirit visiting the scenes of its misdeeds on earth, and especially did I gaze upon the window where I knew was the room in which Lord

Neversham had lain smarting with all his wounds, and I would call the moon and the stars to witness how I repented of the evil I had done.

At last one night I determined to make some sort of atonement. I would sacrifice the gun—the cause of all the woe. I would not do so by giving it away, selling it, or even burying it—no, it had wrought misfortune upon the owner of Bunkum Park, and so its fate should be to be taken there at dead of night, and deserted by me, its liege lord and master. Thrust secretly in through a scullery window which I had marked was usually open, it should be left there with no indication as to whose it was or whence it came.

I may here say that this window was really not a scullery one, but illuminated a lumber-room wherein were many old boxes half filled in some cases with straw that had been used for packing. And so I went forth when my wife was slumbering. I took the gun from the bedside, where it had been placed when I returned home on that terrible day, and whence it had never since been moved, and ruthlessly grasping it in my sacrificial hand, I stalked out into the night and away to Bunkum Park, with firm resolve

and purpose high to cast from me there on the spot the offending weapon.

I have arrived, and have stealthily drawn near to that opened window. I thrust the gun in muzzle first, and as I do so a moonbeam plays upon the bright barrels, and I feel a pang of regret as I touch the delicate triggers now for the last time. It may be weakness, but I feel that I must pull up the hammers and then draw trigger before parting with my "glorious gun"—for it is glorious in the silvern glint of the chaste moon. I do so. Once more I hear the sharp clear click of the lock; once more, stretching forward as I hold the weapon inside the room, I draw trigger, and—merciful heavens! the *gun is loaded, and has gone off with a thunderous and reverberating noise.* The idiot and drunken Pegrum had placed fresh cartridges in it before we went home that bloody day, and I have fired into the house—into the silent, quiet house of Lord Neversham!

There is no time to stay, for I hear barking dogs and many tumultuous sounds, so I turn and flee, away, away, across the Park, startling the deer as I go, pursued only by remorse and conscience. Breathless, at length I look round. "Angels and ministers

of grace! What is that? *Smoke and flames ascending from anigh that window. The house is on fire. I am the incendiary. I, even I, am guilty of arson!*"

The discharge had fired the combustible materials in that room; but why should I go on? Every one knows that Bunkum Park was utterly burned down in all its beauty and splendour. The knowledge of this is world-wide; but no one except myself knows until this narrative is published that it was I, Joseph Slapkins, who sped far away in whirlwinds of shame and grief that night, that it was I who did the fatal deed, and that this was the crowning catastrophe of my glorious gun—this was the final sport reserved by ironical destiny for my shooting—this was the piled-up agony of disaster that proved me beyond all doubt to be the Perilous Parson.



DOG OR MAN?

DOG OR MAN?



CHAPTER I.

MAN IS FAITHLESS AND TREACHEROUS.

MR. JOSEPH JUGGINS ceased in the midst of his dinner, and repeated, for the third time, "It's of no use, Letitia, I simply cannot afford to keep you here, and, unless you can devise some means of contributing to the household purse, you must just go. I don't wish to be unkind, but it is best to speak one's mind."

Mr. Juggins was a wealthy financier, very wealthy; and Letitia was a maiden sister of his, who, being entirely without resources of her own, had been driven to depend on him for bare subsistence, and for the last few months during which she had been an inmate of his house, he had contrived to make her feel her

position with terrible acuteness. Her only friend, so far as she could see, was her dog Topper, a fox terrier of excellent appearance and pedigree, who had been given to her in more palmy days, and who consistently regarded her as the one human being in the whole world worthy of attention.

Mr. Joseph Juggins was a tall, thin man, not bad-looking at first sight, but unpleasant in expression, and distinguished by that drawn, hawk-like cast of feature so commonly to be seen in the City of London, where the predatory avocations of men are but too clearly marked on their countenances.

Miss Letitia Juggins sighed, and said nothing. Her eyes filled with tears, though, and Topper, feeling that something was not right, rose from his place on the hearthrug and looked up at her with that beautiful air of wistful sympathy which can rarely be seen except in a dog's eyes.

The knowledge of his own meanness, the sight of his sister's tears, and the conduct of the dog, all served to irritate Mr. Juggins, and he continued, more roughly still, "Yes, I am determined you shall clear out to-morrow, and that useless brute of a dog, too. Fancy keeping such a beast in luxurious idleness! I

am sure I wish I was in such a position as he is, instead of having to toil and slave to maintain you and him, which I will do no longer, Letitia, not one day longer!" And Mr. Juggins rapped the table vehemently with his fist, while Letitia rose quietly and left the room, accompanied by Topper.

Now, what followed is more likely to have been a dream than a reality ; but, however that may be, Mr. Juggins declares that in the course of the same evening his hastily-expressed wish to be in Topper's place was by some mysterious agency carried into effect.

He felt suddenly that he had become Topper!

Apart from the fact that he was Topper in outward semblance and gifted with Topper's bodily capacities, he was, mentally speaking, unchanged. His anger and alarm were great, but he could express these feelings only by barks and howls, and he desisted even from this when the page boy, Charles, caught him a whack over the head and told him to hold his tongue.

This was down in the hall, and he presently perceived his sister Letitia, dressed and about to leave the house.

"Come along, Topper," she said, and, whether from

physical habit which still controlled the dog's body in which Mr. Juggins's being was merged, or from not knowing what else to do, he followed her.

He began to understand that Letitia had taken him at his word and was departing for good, as he heard her speak to the footman about sending some one to call for her boxes, and the first thought that struck him in this connection was, "What a fool I am to have gone with her! Goodness knows whether she'll be able to maintain me or not;" and acting on this impulse, he rushed back to the door of his house, but, to his inexpressible rage, was driven away by menaces and threats of the footman, who adjured him to "g-r-r-r away, you little beast!" and banged the door in his face, so that nothing remained but to follow his sister.

"Why, Topper, dear," said she, as he came sulkily up, "I never knew you leave me before."

It was about nine o'clock, and Miss Juggins made a series of attempts to obtain an engagement, to commence with a night's lodging, from sundry establishments of milliners and others, where she was well known as having been an excellent customer, but the reply was everywhere the same. It

was too late to talk business that night, and there really was no vacancy in a place which Miss Juggins could fill—every one was politely cold and hopelessly repellant. It was no use, and Miss Juggins turned from her last attempt at 11.30, and burst into tears.

“Silly fool!” thought the canine Mr. Juggins, “she knows perfectly well she might have stayed at my house. It’s only her infernal pride that has made her do this, and here am I actually dependent on her for a night’s lodging!”

“Ah, poor Topper!” said Letitia, looking down affectionately at him, “you’re the only one who doesn’t desert me. You’ll stand by me, won’t you?”

“Will I, though?” mentally ejaculated Mr. Juggins. “Wait till I get the chance of slipping away!”

“My darling old doggie,” continued Miss Juggins, stooping to pat his head, “I am so grieved I have no supper for you : I wish you could find a bone.”

“This is too much—too much,” cried Mr. Juggins, only he spoke in dog language, “that I, Joseph Juggins, who am accustomed to every delicacy in life, should be reduced to a position in which I am advised to find a bone!” and his anger failing to find human expression, he became silent.

At last Letitia, worn out and exhausted, lay down on a bench which was fairly shaded from common view, and Mr. Juggins sat shivering upon the pavement gazing at a big house opposite, where a dance was evidently going on. He felt simply mad with rage and shame. No sooner had Letitia closed her eyes than he got up and left her, made his way across to the house, and proceeded to reconnoitre the entrance.

At that moment Lady Rumbleton's carriage was announced, and a fat old dowager came sailing forth with two charming daughters. The younger one chanced to see Mr. Juggins, and instantly cried,

"Oh, mamma, what a dear little fox terrier! How cold he looks! I wonder whose he is? I do wish we might take him home."

Mr. Juggins put an end to all parley on the matter by at once wagging his tail and jumping into the brougham—for, thought he, "I shall be all right in this shop, at all events, until this infernal spell works off."

Clara Rumbleton, Mr. Juggins's new mistress, was a lovely girl, and she patted and petted him, on the journey homeward, till he became quite complacent:

she even talked of having a basket prepared for him to sleep in her room, but the mother suggested that for aught they knew Mr. Juggins was not accustomed to the house, and he, therefore, must be relegated to the kitchen.

There he was placed after being insulted, as he considered it, by the offer of a basin of bread and milk; a mat was given him as a bed, and he soon became aware that cats—yes, actually cats—were his companions. Now Mr. Juggins, in his natural shape, had the most intense antipathy to cats, and his incorporation with Topper was here peculiarly unfortunate. Physically speaking, Topper was eminently cut out for the destruction of cats, and it was only by careful training that he had been induced to keep his body under sufficiently to maintain a thin veneer of amity towards them.

Topper's body combined **with** Mr. Juggins's altogether unrestrained hatred for the feline race could have but one result. There were three pet cats in that kitchen, and before morning Mr. Juggins had destroyed them all.

It is needless to detail the consternation and sorrow of the household when the dread discovery was made,

but a fearful indignity was inflicted on Mr. Juggins : the footman was ordered to *whip him*, and the order was obeyed, the pompous menial laying on all the harder because he felt that he had been requested to do something wholly *infra dig*.

There being no more cats to destroy, Clara pleaded that Mr. Juggins would be powerless to do further harm, and so he was retained ; but on the very first day he was convicted of snapping at one of the children who wanted to play with him—for he abominated children ; he displayed an unpleasantly revengeful spirit by biting the footman who had whipped him as that worthy sat at dinner ; he refused with scorn all the food that was offered to him, but was found to be helping himself from the lunch-table when the family had left the room ; and when Clara, at last, took him out for a walk, he felt it so insufferable to be compelled to trot at the heels of a woman that he gave her the slip and went off for a stroll on his own account, thinking to return when he felt inclined, and cursing his unhappy fate—which, however, as is often the case in dreams, did not strike him by any means in the same extraordinary light as it will the reader.

CHAPTER II.

HYDROPHOBIA—THE HOME FOR LOST DOGS.

MR. JUGGINS, in his canine shape, trotted along for some while, not thinking very much where he was going, for, indeed, it never occurred to him that there could be any difficulty in finding his way home. There are always hansoms in which to drive or policemen to consult—at least so far as human beings go—and it did not occur to Mr. Juggins that as he now was, in bodily presence and every physical capacity, the fox terrier Topper, he would be shut off from these common resources of civilization.

He soon found this out, however, when having been pursued by a virulent bull terrier almost under the wheels of a passing omnibus, he bethought him that the house would be a safer place, and set about to journey thither accordingly. To his extreme horror it then flashed across him that hansoms and policemen were alike inaccessible to him, and he also dis-

covered that he had lost the power of reading the names of the streets or the numbers on the doors.

"I have known," mused he, "that brute, the real Topper, come home all by himself a hundred times. How the deuce did he manage it?"

Ay, how indeed? any one may well ask; unless we are to take it that a man is inferior to a dog. There is nothing so very outrageous in this proposition; indeed, on second thoughts, it may be boldly affirmed that a man who has debased and crushed the Divine portion of his being *is* inferior, *very* inferior, to a dog.

Mr. Juggins, however, could not understand this, and he ran wildly about, mad with anger at his inability to either find or ask his way, until he eventually bolted down a passage in a low quarter of London, where a lot of boys were playing such poor games as the squalid place had scope for.

"Oh! look y'ere, Bill! 'Ere's a dawg. Let's have a lark with 'im."

Thus spake one ragged and dirty imp, to whom another replied, "Here's a spree! let's tie mother's kettle to his tail."

Before Mr. Juggins had grasped the meaning of their words he was seized, and though he tried hard

to bite his captors, his efforts were unavailing. The kettle—a light tin one—was attached to his tail, and in a moment the boys had thrown him down and chased him out of the yard.

“It is absurd to be frightened of a kettle,” reasoned Mr. Juggins; but the clangour of that utensil behind him was so deafening, and gave so much the impression that an artillery train, at the least, was about to run over him, that he fled, calmly at first and then in a panic, pursued by the yells of the boys and the shouts of the populace.

Away, away, faster and faster he flew, his mind distraught with wild and desperate alarms; dogs rushing out and biting at him as he went by; men throwing stones, and every one, as it seemed, joining in the pursuit.

Suddenly the kettle parted from his tail, but the fear had now got hold on him so completely that he continued his flight all the same. A policeman barred his progress for a moment, but in his rage and terror he had no scruple in biting the minion of the law well through the calf of his leg. The bitten official at once roared out “Mad dog! mad dog!” and with that the hue and cry became of vastly greater proportions,

swelling into one volume of clamour—"Mad dog! mad dog!"

Mr. Juggins was now in a condition which differed but little from actual madness, so panicstricken and terrified was he. Several persons did he bite when they crossed his path, and all the while the horrors of the chase whirled his mind into a more chaotic frenzy of alarm. Stones were thrown at him without number; policemen rushed on him with uplifted truncheons; women shrieked, children screamed, and still he sped along, providentially endowed with the extraordinary endurance which illustrious parents had bestowed on the actual Topper.

Almost by accident, certainly not by design, on turning a corner of the road he darted down a long narrow passage, through the open door of one of the outbuildings, and up the flue of a chimney. There he lay half dead with breathlessness and fatigue; but the peril was past, the sound of the pursuers died away, —he was safe!

Some hours afterwards he crawled out, a battered and miserable-looking object, and he then remembered how in his magisterial capacity he had been most particular to instruct the police as to the ne-

cessity of stamping out hydrophobia by the most rigorous application of their legal powers.

"After all," thought he, "there may be a good deal of exaggeration as to the madness of dogs," and, while he was thus thinking, he was incensed beyond measure to find himself suddenly seized and carried off by a police officer. "Surely to goodness the man doesn't think me mad now?" he inwardly queried; and then he lapsed into a state of apathetic despair, until he discovered, to his intense indignation, that he had actually been conveyed to the Home for Lost Dogs.

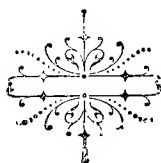
"I am sure the real Topper would never have been such a fool as to land himself in this plight and in this place," ejaculated he. At the same time, from a dog point of view, the place was far from bad. Nice clean kennels, good wholesome food, dry beds to lie on, and company, if not select, at least bound together by the common tie of misfortune.

But Mr. Juggins could not see it in this light at all. When he was introduced to his new companions, and they all with one accord—"mongrel, puppy, whelp, and hound, and curs of low degree"—came sniffing and walking around him, he did not conceal his abhorrence of their familiarities.

“Keep your distance, can’t you?” said he to a hideous blar-eyed white dog, which was more obtrusive than any others in its approaches. “Get out, you beast!” he added to a collie. “Understand that I will *not* be sniffed at in this intolerable fashion!” he roared out to a retriever; and finally he snapped at the blar-eyed white dog, who had just replied “Why, I’m only trying to be civil to you,” and had resumed its irritating advances. The blar-eyed white dog, being, in fact, a mongrel bull terrier, was very quick to take offence, and incontinently seized Mr. Juggins by the neck and shook him violently, turned him over and pinned him in the breast, while the other dogs at once began to set on him also. He was with difficulty rescued by the attendants from his perilous position, and it was found impossible to leave him in that kennel with safety any longer. He was tried in another kennel with fresh companions, with precisely similar results. His manner of receiving the friendly overtures of his fellow-dogs was so grossly insulting that he at once paid the penalty and was half worried before he could be torn from their jaws.

At last it was resolved to tie him up alone for the night, and to decide on his fate the next day.

Stiff, sore, and tired was he when he awoke in the morning, and reflected that his misfortunes had come upon him altogether from the want of moral and mental qualities of a kind which Topper himself indisputably possessed. He sadly partook of the plain but healthy fare which was offered him; then, as he sat blinking and ruminating, he was startled by the approach of several footsteps, and to his utter amazement saw before him his sister Letitia, and *himself*, *Joseph Juggins!*



CHAPTER III.

DOGS ARE KIND, FAITHFUL, AND WISE.

IT is needless to say that Mr. Juggins, who, it will be remembered, had been transformed into the fox terrier Topper, and was located at the Dogs' Home, saw a person who to all appearance was himself, looking at him, and accompanied by Miss Letitia Juggins, his sister—it is needless to say that Mr. Juggins, in his canine shape, fairly bristled with amazement.

He had not long, however, to think about the matter, for Miss Letitia quickly espied him, and, with a cry of delight, rushed up with all sorts of demonstrations of affection.

“My darling Topper! Oh, how glad I am to have found you! What a blessing it is, Joseph, we thought of coming here! Poor old doggie then! Why, you’ve been sadly knocked about, haven’t you? Never mind, you shall come home straight with us, and we’ll give

you such a good dinner, and you shall be so happy—dear old dog!” &c., &c.

Mr. Juggins was far from gratified by this demonstration; though he was bound to confess that there was a certain feeling of pleasure in being thus affectionately addressed.

“Strange,” thought he, “no one seemed so fond of me as long as I was myself.”

Then there was the mystery of this exact counterpart of himself who was standing by and had as yet said nothing. At last the being—the externally seeming Joseph Juggins—spoke:

“Yes, old man, come along. You never liked me, I know. Indeed, were I a man—that is to say, many a man would consider himself as owing you a grudge for past misconduct, but, bless you, I forgive you. Poor old fellow! I daresay you have been sadly bothered the last day or so.” And the speaker stooped down to pat Mr. Juggins on the head.

So indignant, however, was that gentleman to see his own body thus acting altogether outside his own control, and in a spirit altogether foreign to his nature, that he snapped angrily at his would-be benefactor, and showed evident signs of irrepressible bad temper.

There was a momentary gleam in the eyes of the *de facto* Juggins at this outbreak, but Letitia broke in. "How dare you do that, Topper? You bad dog! But perhaps, Joseph, he is worn out and cross with all his troubles. Let us get him home, and then, I'm sure, he will never do such a thing again."

Mr. Juggins was eventually conveyed to his own home, and to his intense irritation was constrained to occupy the position of Topper in the household.

He presently began to suspect that the same freak of fortune which had converted him into the dog, had converted the dog into him. It must be so, for the individuality of Topper would naturally require some resting-place when ousted from Topper's body, and the body of Mr. Juggins, being vacated by its owner, would naturally afford a convenient receptacle for the dog. No sooner had this idea got hold on Mr. Juggins, than he began to observe with much greater minuteness the actions of his apparent self.

He soon found, from listening to conversation, that this humanized Topper had tracked out Miss Letitia Juggins by some extraordinary means that very same night when she was lying on the bench in the extremity of desolation. He had found her, had raised

ner up, kissed her, and, to her utter astonishment, besought her to come back home ; had promised to do everything in his power to make her happy, to devote his whole life, his whole fortune, his every thought to her service ; and being somewhat carried away by his emotion, he had added that it would always be to him the supremest pleasure to lie on a mat outside her door and protect her from every possible injury. Thereupon, this remarkable brother of hers had frisked and gambolled around her for a few moments in such a manner that she could not choose but laugh when he pulled himself together and went along home with her, casting ever and anon such a tender, true, and honest glance upon her that she was fairly bewildered with surprise and joy.

“Dear Joseph,” said Miss Juggins one evening to her supposed brother, while the *de jure* Mr. Juggins lay with one eye half open on the hearthrug, “I am so happy now ; and I shall never be able to thank you enough for being so kind and loving to me as you are!”

The brother made no reply, but glanced affectionately at her, and the sofa-cushion behind him moved softly to and fro as his emotion seemed to vibrate through him.

"Ycs, dearest Joseph, I shall never forgive myself for the unkind thoughts which I used to entertain towards you once. I ought to have known that it was the cares and worries of business which so troubled and changed you ; but, foolish woman that I was, I said in my haste that you were a selfish, cold, calculating, heartless brute ; and now when I know that you are, oh, so kind, so self-sacrificing, so truly loving, I could hate myself for ever for having harboured those unkind thoughts!"

All this was far from pleasant hearing to the canine Mr. Juggins, who lay on the hearthrug ; yet it gave him much food for reflection. He could not but note the extreme happiness which seemed to pervade the house, and he contrasted it with the sullen gloom which characterized the period when he was there *in propria persona*.

The servants, one and all, obeyed the orders and anticipated the wants of their present master with a cheerfulness and alacrity altogether unprecedented in the experience of Mr. Juggins. There was a gentle grace about the manner in which the pseudo-Juggins accepted or asked for services, and every one seemed to be fairly charmed by him, so that

it was evident his life was made as pleasant to him as possible.

"Topper isn't half so nice as he used to be," exclaimed Miss Juggins, one day. "I can't tell what's come over him; he's got so nasty and irritable, and he doesn't seem a bit affectionate now. If it was not that I remember what a dear dog he used to be, I should feel inclined to give him away. Bill Jones, the ratcatcher, was saying, only the other day, that he would like to have him."

The bare idea of being consigned to the tender mercies of Bill Jones and utilized for the destruction of rats, sent a cold shiver through Mr. Juggins's frame; and then he thought, "I suppose I must make some show of being fond of her. It's evidently necessary in my own interests."

So Mr. Juggins sidled about, and wagged his tail, and fawned upon Miss Juggins, till she quickly forgave him his neglect, though she remarked "Somehow I don't trust Topper as I did; he doesn't look at you in the same honest and true way that he used to do. He is certainly changed."

It was with great horror one day that he heard the *de facto* Juggins say to his sister, "Letitia, dear, I have

a Mr. Hoffman coming to see me on business of importance. It may be well to ask him to stay to luncheon, and the servants mustn't interrupt us while he is here." I say that Mr. Juggins heard this with horror, for Mr. Hoffman was a mighty man of business with whom he had been just about to embark on a very large financial transaction indeed—one which was to result in a huge fortune for both if properly managed. Mr. Juggins had inquired about Mr. Hoffman through all sorts of channels, and had satisfied himself in every possible way that he was a man of the most undoubted stability and unimpeachable honour, though sharp and shrewd in no common degree. Mr. Juggins had thought himself most fortunate in getting an introduction to Mr. Hoffman, and more fortunate still in getting the great man to appoint to meet him at his own house ; and now the fictitious Juggins was about to personate him at this interview, and would probably make a hopeless mess of the whole thing.

In his anxiety to hear what occurred Mr. Juggins hid under the sofa in the library, and watched his Topper-inhabited body as it dozed, half curled up, in a large easy chair.

Presently the visitor was announced—Mr. Hoffman—and in walked a gentleman of florid complexion, hearty manners, and generally hail-fellow-well-met sort of expression. Mr. Juggins himself had all along thought that honesty was stamped upon the man's countenance.

He lay trembling with excitement to hear how his canine representative would deal with the business matter.

He was not kept long in suspense, for, to his intense dismay, the apparent Juggins rose, surveyed Mr. Hoffman for a moment, affected not to see his proffered hand, and bowed coldly.

Mr. Hoffman became a little more rubicund, but plunged straight off into the interesting topic.

“Well, Mr. Juggins, how about this project? I've made a calculation here that by an outlay of twenty-five thousand pounds you and I can float the whole thing magnificently. It is a large sum, I know; but, as you are aware, ‘there's millions in it.’”

“I do know it; I do,” whined Mr. Juggins under the sofa, “and likely enough that fool will lose all.”

Mr. Juggins's worst fears were realized when his personator arose and said, with great coldness, “Thank

you, sir ; I have looked into the papers and decided not to touch this matter."

Mr. Hoffman flushed up angrily.

"What, after all your promises to me ! After making me lose my market elsewhere ! Not if I know it ! I'll have compensation from you, at all events."

"The compensation which, I should instinctively say, you are most likely to obtain, sir, is an apartment in Holloway Gaol."

This was what the *de facto* Juggins said ; yes, there could be no mistake about it. The business was not only lost, but the man was brutally insulted ; and Mr. Juggins himself under the sofa was fairly mad with rage and disappointment. Somewhat to his surprise, Hoffman turned deadly pale, and quietly left the room ; but here Mr. Juggins's emotions became so strong that he--awoke, and found himself slumbering in his arm-chair. He jumped up, looked in the glass. Yes, he was all right now. He had only been indulging in forty winks after dinner.

There was a noise downstairs, and he walked out and looked into the hall. Behold, the scene of his dream was being enacted ! Letitia, whom he had

reated with such cruel unkindness, was just leaving the house with Topper.

Mr. Juggins rushed down the stairs, and, regardless of the servants, caught her in his arms.

“Letitia, my dear sister, forgive me!”

It is needless to say his peace was soon made, nor was it ever afterwards broken. Topper advanced at once into supreme favour; but the *Special Standard* that night announced the arrest of Mr. Hoffham for forgery.



“A MAN’S A MAN FOR A’ THAT.”

“ A MAN’S A MAN FOR A’ THAT ”



CHAPTER I.

“ A dusky night rides down the sky,
And ushers in the morn ;
The hounds all join in glorious cry,
The huntsman winds his horn,
When a hunting we do go,” &c.

NOT many years ago, in the month of November,
I was standing somewhat mournfully at the
open door of a loose box. I had but two hunters in
those days : one was coughing badly, and now the
second had taken upon himself to become mys-
teriously lame. He had carried me well the day
before in a run with the York and Ainsty, but this
morning he seemed to have suffered no little damage
in his off fore foot, leg, or shoulder, but for the life of

us neither my groom nor I could tell exactly what was wrong.

It is unnecessary to describe in many words who or where I was. It is enough that my name is Thomas Maynard. I was then but twenty-two years old, living on my own small property of Knapston, in the North Riding of Yorkshire. Neither I nor my belongings have much to do with this story; I am simply the mouthpiece by which it will be told. To me, thus standing, there suddenly came up from behind, with a cheerful greeting and a startling slap on the back, a young friend, Charlie D'Aguilar, who had been walking past the house with his gun and a young pointer dog, which he was bent on breaking to his own mind. His shooting lay not far from me, and so I often saw him as he was going towards it. He was little over seventeen years old, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow, whose husband had acquired considerable fame in the Indian army, but had died of fever when really quite a young man. He had left his widow very well off, though, and she lived on happily at Conyers, devoting herself to the son. He was a strange wild boy, shockingly averse from school, but thoroughly sound and good really.

Rather small and slight for his age, he was lithe and active as a monkey, and his face, which was delicately cut in the lines of wonderful beauty, yet showed in the clear eye and the fresh colour all the signs of vigorous health.

Indeed, Charlie D'Aguiar was great at all field sports at that early time of his life; but his mother, being urged thereto by his somewhat stern uncle, would not keep him more than one horse for his especial behoof, and he was therefore fain to get an immense lot of work out of that one, which was at the present time a varmint-looking little Irish mare, named Molly, well bred, fast, and as clever as a cat. He got two days a week out of her regularly, and upon a pinch would drive her in the dog-cart also; and for all this work he and she were very bad indeed to beat, for the mare was as hard as nails, and he was a born horseman, with the neatest of seats and the best of hands, aided by the bright free courage and spirit which any judge of physiognomy could see most clearly in his face.

"What's up now, Tom?" asked he.

"Why, look there; Marcus is dead lame, and old Shylock's coughing. The Bedale meet at Knapston

mill to-morrow. There are lots of foxes about, and there's sure to be good sport, but I can't go."

"Ah! that's bad. Stand over, horse. Yes, I see he's lame enough; can scarcely move even in his box. Look here, old man: I hate going out without you; I'll put Molly in the dog-cart, and we'll put plenty of lunch and drink for friends, and we'll go hunting that way."

Of course I protested at first, but he was resolute, and in the end it was agreed that we should do as he said. He would call for me in the morning; and so he went off with his dog, singing snatches of old songs, and in the very highest spirits—I suppose the result of the kind action he had done in thus befriending me. Before going, however, he had said to me,

"We'll be getting some more horses very soon now. My Cousin Kate came yesterday from Ireland. She says she remembers you when she was quite small. She's going to live with us, you know, and she's had to beat across country, I believe."

"What's she like?" asked I, with a dreamy recollection of a small fat girl long years ago.

"Oh! they say she's like me, but I'm sure I don't

know—and don't care, so long as we get some more horses."

Next morning soon came, and a very promising one it was. Charlie arrived in very good time, driving Molly, in his light shooting-cart, and having taken in some additional supplies at my house, we started on our way. It was just a little cold, and the atmosphere rather inclined to be damp and misty, but we were very comfortable, and the novelty of what we were about was quite enlivening.

"I say, though," remarked I, "we shall get awfully chaffed if we go to the meet. Don't you think we'd better drive on so as to nick in with them afterwards?" "Maybe you're right there," said Charlie. "They'll draw Jones's Whin first, and if we turn up the Allerton Road here, we shall go close past it."

This then we agreed to do, and pulled into a walk in consequence, so that we might not reach the Whin, which was only a mile and a half distant, before the hounds got there.

"I've been thinking," said Charlie, meditatively, as we went thus soberly along, "what'll be our best way to see the sport when they get away, as they are sure to do. He's pretty sure to make for the Tadcaster

covers, and we could drive round all the way, but the road makes such a long bend that we should hardly get a view. I suppose we must try and get across country a bit. I should think we might drive through a gap or two, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, easy enough; only we must have the bottles made fast, and it would be as well to take off ulsters, so that we can nip out more handily, if we come to grief."

"Right you are. But hark! Why, they're there already. Get on, mare."

And sure enough, as we drew over the brow of the slope which commands a view of Jones's Whin and miles of adjacent country, and looked in the direction of the voices we had heard, red coats and the whole field flashed before our gaze some quarter of a mile off; and the glints of white, instant seen and instant lost, among the thick cover, as the hounds dashed busily through and about it, showed that we were none too early. The master was hunting them himself that day, his huntsman, Thatcher, having had a bad fall; but no one understood the business better than Mr. Booth. He was, and indeed still is, a thorough workman, both in all that pertains to the

knowledge of hounds and the art of getting across country after them, despite his heavy weight. The road ran right past one side of the Whin, and as we drove up we found many of our friends and acquaintances there, while others had ridden into the fields at the side, but were kept back as far as possible, that the fox might have a fair chance to go away in the expected direction. Many and various were the greetings we received, but it would serve no useful purpose to detail them here. The field was a rather numerous one for the Bedale, and there was quite an influx of ladies from Tadcaster Hall, where Sir John and Lady Prescott were entertaining a number of visitors. A rare old sort was Sir John, with one of the finest stables of hunters in the kingdom, and always ready with a mount for those of his friends who had not their own horses.

He himself was there, mounted on a grand weight-carrier; and there was his hopeful eldest son Jack, twenty-five years old, handsome as paint, neat as a new pin, but game as a pebble for all that, to use a few somewhat trite similitudes.

Lady Prescott herself was a delicate woman, that would never venture herself on the back of a horse;

and the stout old baronet would often say to his son, "It beats me, Jack, how you come to go as straight as you do. You're only bred right for it on one side of your head."

"Ah, you see *I favour my sire*," Jack would reply; whereat his father would be greatly pleased, although there perhaps never was a man fonder of his wife.

Now, Jack had been allowed so much of his own way during his youth, and had been thrown so much among all the circumstances of sport, that he had come to regard skill in riding as a *sine quâ non* for woman as well as man, and was perfectly ready to take for granted all other good qualities if the one he admired so much was there. He was by way of being engaged to his cousin, Edith Hope, one of the nicest girls in all the country-side, but not a hard one across country. A graceful pretty rider she was, but without the devil in her that animates many of her sex; and indeed she would not have gone in for hunting at all but that she knew it pleased Jack, whom she thought no end of, it was so nice to see his look of satisfaction if she ever managed to get along creditably. Staying at Tadcaster, there was Lady Janet Barrington, a very go-ahead young lady, of some

reputation in the shires. She was unquestionably good to look at, though the appearance of "dash" about her was rather too pronounced. She had with her one of her own horses, Marmion, a fine chestnut thorough-bred, clever and fast enough for anything, it was said, and there she was on him that day. Mrs. Cunningham, a hard-featured weather-beaten widow, wiry and business-like, was also of the party. She was mounted upon a neat little bay of Sir John Prescott's, kept by him expressly for ladies; and Edith Hope was, as usual, looking rather nervous on her steady old mare, Betty. There were one or two hard-riding army men, a Frenchman, M. de Vimerai, fearfully and wonderfully got up for the chase, whom also Sir John had mounted, and a very gorgeous young gentleman named Rankin, a recent importation into society—from whence no one exactly knew. He was rich, faultlessly attired, adorned with an elaborate buttonhole, and by his own account could ride, though he hardly seemed at home upon his rather fidgety horse, bought, with others, at Darby's for a long price shortly before the time. His whip, too, appeared to incommode him, as he was for ever trying to gather the lash more comfortably into his hand; once indeed

he endeavoured to crack it but with signally ill success, inasmuch as he lashed his horse in his effort, so that the animal nearly sprang from under him, and having lost a stirrup and become seriously discomposed in his saddle, he gathered up the lash again and remained quiet.

It was an unusually big day for the Bedale, and the hope that the strangers would see some sport was not to be disappointed; for in far less time than it has taken me to briefly mention these few characters, a fox was on foot, and the burst of music as the hounds opened on the drag stirred every heart, though in very different ways. Molly became quite excited, and impatient of the retarding dog-cart, and so far as she was concerned it was clear we should have no obstacle to our cross-country projects.

Jones's Whin is on the left-hand side of the road to any one driving up from the direction we had done, and out beyond it is a fine grass country stretching away towards Tadcaster. Getting a fox away from this Whin is by no means an easy matter; it is so thick that it is very difficult for hounds to press him hard enough. Look at the Master, striding about on foot among it all, while his horse stands motionless,

waiting for him. More than once we catch a glimpse of the "thief of the world" as he peeps out and then doubles back again. But they are pushing him closer now; the "musical discord" waxes more confident and determined; he can't stand it much longer, artful though he is. What an edging and sidling about there is now to get a start! Molly becomes nearly unmanageable.

"We must get clear of all this," said I, "or we shall be in the ditch;" so we drove on up the yard a few hundred yards, and then struck off by a line of gates into the fields. At this moment came the welcome shout, "Away!" from one of the whips.

"Yonder he goes!" cried Charlie, in great excitement; "he couldn't have taken a better line for us"—and I had just time to see him slipping away towards Tadcaster, a direction paralled with our gates—Mr. Booth getting the hounds out of cover in fine style; Jack Prescott, Lady Janet Barrington, and Mrs. Cunningham evidently securing a good start; and then we, too, were away, bumping across ridge and furrow in a manner that would bring disaster on any but the best of springs. It is my task to jump out and open the gates, and I do it with all possible

speed ; but the hounds are running now, and we are dropping astern.

"By Jove, we're going to be out of it," said Charlie, as, after getting through the seventh and last gate, we saw them going like pigeons, far ahead of us, and evidently taxing the powers of the field to keep within hail of them.

"There's only John Booth with them," continued he, "and Prescott, and Lady What's-her-name, and the old woman. My word, but those women can go, can't they? I know that fence they've flown just now takes some doing. Ah, look! there goes the Frenchman. Well done! he's over; on his horse's ears; but no matter, he's managed to scramble back again. There's old Prescott! Hold 'em up, Johnny! That's right. Look at that funking fool of a Rankin; he's riding off right away round there to a gate with Miss Hope. I never did see a man do any good who hunted in Yorkshire with flowers in his buttonhole. But I say, Tom, old man, we must try to get forward—think we can do that gap? Hold tight."

I held tight, and we got over or through with tolerable ease, and gaining confidence as we progressed, negotiated sundry much more formidable obstacles.

The springs seemed unbreakable ; the only difficulty was to avoid being shot out by the awful propulsive bumps as we landed from time to time on *terra firma*. But it was no use : we were at last obliged to pull up, for the hounds had got fairly out of sight, and we had come upon a ditch which we could not hope to get over.

"We must give it up," said I.

"I'm afraid so ; let's drive up to the right here, on the high ground, and perhaps we can see a bit more. Then we can get away to the road, and on till we fall in with them again."

So we trotted off—Molly much more sedate now—up the rising slope, a mile beyond which lay the road leading to Tadcaster, and thence, much to our joy, we again got a view, but so far off were they now that we could not possibly distinguish individuals. They were going as fast as ever.

"What a gallop for those who are in it !" muttered Charlie.

"I'm sorry now," broke in I, "that you bothered about me and the dog-cart ; look what you've missed."

"My dear fellow, don't mention it ; we'll be with

them yet in due time. See, by Jove! there's a check."

There was, sure enough, and we could descry what was evidently Mr. Booth just taking the hounds in hand after they had cast themselves ineffectually.

"If we get on to the road quickly now," cried I, "we may catch them."

And we were just starting, when suddenly my companion exclaimed,

"Isn't that a hat held up, back to the right of them there? It is; and you may take your oath he's been headed by somebody. Booth sees it now. Look! the fox is back hard enough, Tom, and he must be coming this way!"

It was indeed so; Mr. John Johnson had been shooting in the rough grass where the check had occurred, and his young retriever had broken all bounds and chased the fox, most effectually driving him from his point—the Tadcaster cover—and causing him to hastily retire by a circuitous route towards the place whence he had come. Mr. John Johnson, seeing what he had done, quickly made tracks from the field, and having got back some distance unobserved on the fox's fresh line, held up his hat, as if he had

not wrought the harm himself, but had simply viewed Reynard from where he now was.

The whole thing was very quickly done, and the tailed-off field had not time to draw up before the hounds were rattling along again, and coming right in our direction, though hanging somewhat to the right of us, nearer the Tadcaster Road. We were, of course, delighted, for from our point of view nothing could be better; and there we sat, all eyes and excitement, while the mare, too, seemed to have observed what had happened and grew restless again. It was a most sporting sight as they came on right half face towards us, and grew gradually more and more distinct.

The scent was first-rate, and there was no mistake about the pace. We felt glad that the hounds were showing the strangers how they could travel; perhaps the pack was presenting a rather longer tail now than was strictly orthodox, but the average was undeniable.

"There seem to be all the ladies with them now," said Charlie; for Rankin, who had taken charge of Miss Hope, had by chance succeeded in cutting across and nicking in again, as had many others, who would

never have seen the hounds again had they gone straight away on.

Thus, as we watched we saw the small brown object come moving quickly along—and nearer, nearer still, till he crossed the top end of the very field in which we were, only some hundred and fifty yards away. He was very draggled-looking, but had some strength left still, as it seemed. We were quite silent, for it was no time for words. There were the hounds only three fields off, running quite mute now; and sticking well to them, Jack Prescott comes crashing through an ugly-looking bullfinch, followed close—much too close—by Lady Janet. Mrs. Cunningham had a line of her own on the right; and the Master whom no horse in the world could carry far at such a speed has dropped back a bit. It is simply glorious, and Molly rears and sidles about, while, with a dash, the pack are through and over the last hedge, and are driving away, heads up and sterns down, across our view. Then come the field; it is all sound good grass, and as Jack Prescott lands cleverly over the plain stake-and-bound fence and ditch into the same enclosure as ourselves, we can see from his expression that he is enjoying himself no little. How well he

looks in all the pride of good horsemanship and love of sport! Lady Janet is sticking to him yet, very dishevelled in appearance, and not retaining much elegance of seat. Still she is there, but thanks to her heart rather than her hands. Mrs. Cunningham is decidedly more businesslike as she goes rattling past; and the Master, though just a bit short of speed, is still about the mark. The various army men are going to the best of their ability; but there is not one among them can hold a candle to Jack Prescott. Some, I notice, have spurred their horses all over the fore arms, through sheer clumsiness. The good Sir John himself is riding straight as a line; but he is out of breath, and there is an ominous shake about Blunderbore's tail as he passes us which says very plainly,

"Hold, enough!"

And now, cautiously creeping over the gap which has been made, we observe Rankin, followed by poor Edith Hope, who, for a few happy minutes, had been with Jack, but had, to her sorrow, dropped astern once more, feeling devoid of any charity towards Lady Janet.

Such a sight as all this, was one that no one can

ever see who is riding to hounds himself, and for once in a way, at any rate, it is well worth trying to manage. Very strongly indeed did we feel this, as we turned and made the best of our way along. The line was now coming round towards Jones's Whin, the opposite side to that from which we had gone away ; and another hundred yards showed us the whole panorama again going straight towards Tillerton Beck, which lay between us and the Whin—only about a quarter of a mile from where we stood. The beck is not very formidable, generally speaking, being barely twelve feet wide, but it is now almost full up with water, and an exclamation breaks from both of us as we see Prescott's horse gallop clean into it, shooting his rider, by lucky fortune, on to the opposite side. Lady Janet by merest chance has diverged slightly from her close pursuit of him, and the first thing he sees on getting up, is her chestnut, landing grandly over a few yards from one side of him.

"Not hurt, Mr. Prescott, I hope?" says she.

"Oh, no; I'm all right."

"Then I'd better get to the hounds." And away she goes, well knowing Jack's admiration for keenness of sport in the female breast. Mrs. Cunningham comes

slinging along, and takes the water in her stride as a matter of course.

"The old one can go too," thinks Jack, and busies himself about extricating his horse, until he becomes aware that Rankin and Edith Hope have arrived at the opposite side. We have drawn quite close, and can hear all that goes on. Poor Edith feeling that she *must* not turn back in the presence of Jack, asks Mr. Rankin to give her a lead, and that gentleman sees no escape. Consequently he rides at the beck with great demonstration of arms-working, heels-spurring, &c., and then his horse, losing confidence from the nervous hands that confuse his mouth, stops short, and the gorgeous, resplendent Rankin has soused over head in the water.

"Capital!" said Charlie. "That's a sort of thing one sees in pictures, but seldom in actual life. I knew that buttonhole would come to no good."

Rankin scrambles out on the wrong side, and his horse is far enough before we can get down to catch him.

"Come on, Edith," says Jack; and she timidly essays to put Betty at the water; but of course the worthy mare refuses, as she can feel that her mistress

doesn't mean business. Jack looks on in some disgust.

"D'Aguilar," he cries, "you get down, like a good fellow, and ride her over for Miss Hope."

"Oh! thank you, Mr. D'Aguilar. I should be so much obliged."

And Edith hastily dismounts, and Charlie, who can ride woman-side, it seems, as readily as if he were to the manner born, scrambles up, then taking old Betty a short distance back, catches hold of her head, and shoving her along in a manner that must astonish her no little, pops her over before she fairly knows where she is. Then, and not till then, does Edith say,

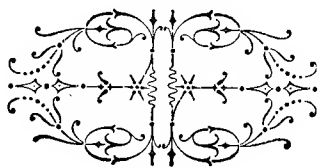
"But how am I to get over?"

No one had thought of this, and we all burst out laughing. Jack's horse had at last climbed up the bank, and he was again mounting. Charlie, who was athirst for more riding, solved the question.

"You'd better jump into the dog-cart with Tom, Miss Hope. He'll drive you away, round by the road, over the bridge, and come on to Jones's Whin again; I'll meet you there with the mare. Mr. Rankin, you have been in once, you'd better *swim* back to them."

And with that he and Jack were off, while I could

not help laughing at the extraordinary figure he cut, though I thought to myself that his seat might well serve as an example to any lady I ever saw. Rankin declined to return, but plodded sulkily forward, and so I was left with the dog-cart and Miss Hope.



CHAPTER II.

“There’s no want of meat, sir ;
Portly and curious viands are prepared,
To please all kinds of appetites.”
—MASSINGER.

EDITH HOPE and I were old friends, so I took her up in the dog-cart quite as a matter of course, and succeeded very soon in getting on to the road. She did not say much ; indeed, her thoughts were evidently far enough away, and I could guess where—for she well knew how Lady Janet’s performance would take Jack’s fancy, and that Lady herself would doubtless enjoy attracting him, whether she meant anything or nothing so far as the future was concerned. So we drove on pretty silently till we again come upon the field near Jones’s Whin. The hounds had run into their fox some few hundred yards before he could reach this refuge, and the honours of the gallop lay along with Lady Janet and Mrs. Cunningham. Charlie had arrived, having made the best of his time

and of Betty, and he seemed quite sorry to give up his mount, which of course he had to do. Our supplies of lunch were now in great request, and we were voted most estimable persons, and recommended always to come out in the same way; but there was no more sport worth mentioning that day, save that M. de Vimerai, who took every available chance of going at top speed, whether hounds were running or not, fairly finished his horse at last, so that it blundered and fell at a small fence, and couldn't or wouldn't get up again. The Frenchman was beside himself at this catastrophe, and after passionate appeals to the animal itself, he ended by offering it to any one who would get it up for him. "I will give you this horse, sare, if you will make him rise." I suppose in due course the horse rose on its own account; but considering that it belonged to Sir John Prescott, the generosity of M. de Vimerai's offer was very striking.

Jack Prescott devoted himself to Lady Janet for the rest of the day; it was plain he had been struck all in a heap, as he would have phrased it, by her cross-country abilities, and she seemed, for the time being at any rate, well pleased with him. Rankin having, to the huge delight of Charlie, been kicked off

his second horse the instant he got on to it, had gone home to change his things, he was so wet ; and Edith was looking on the whole very miserable, though old Sir John, as usual, made much of her. But, as I have said, sport was at an end, and after a somewhat wearisome afternoon we found ourselves close by Tadcaster, and the hounds just going home.

Molly wanted a rest, and Sir John urged us to put up and come in. "You must stay and dine now you are here," said he. "Never mind about dress. I won't take any refusal." So we stayed, nothing loth.

As to the dinner, I have no remarks to make, except that it was unimpeachable ; and the general impression of the evening is only important in so far as it showed up Jack Prescott as still more assiduous in his attentions to Lady Janet. I couldn't help feeling sorry for it myself, for poor Edith evidently took it to heart. "It's all because of the riding," thought I. "I wish to goodness he could have seen her style of going, in the same way we did."

Lady Prescott was ill that night, and obliged to go to bed, and we somehow ended proceedings in the billiard-room, Sir John having nodded off to sleep not wholly innocent of snores. There were several more

of the party, but they are unimportant to this story. Rankin, who was now quite revived, happened to say,

"Upon my word, Mrs. Cunningham, you and Lady Janet ought to make a match across country, you both went so well to-day."

From this comparatively meaningless remark a discussion happened to arise, and Lady Janet astonished us all by exclaiming, "Oh, let's have a ladies' steeple-chase; it will be such fun!"

Jack gazed at her with delight, and said,

"Capital! The best thing I've heard of for some time. We have a course ready made round the park, you know. Mrs. Cunningham, you'll start, I'm sure; and you too, Edith, won't you?"

Edith said "Yes" with anything but alacrity.

"That's right, that'll make three. Isn't there any one else?"

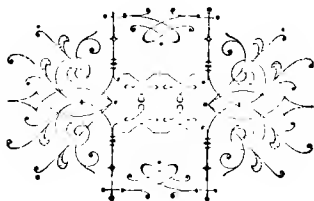
Here Charlie broke in:

"My cousin Kate's just come from Ireland. I'll get her to ride Molly if you like."

"Very well. When shall it be? say the day after to-morrow, about eleven o'clock."

And so Jack settled the preliminaries of this remarkable encounter.

We left shortly after this and drove home safely, having thoroughly discussed the intended steeplechase in the meanwhile. It was rather out of Charles's way to go round by my house, and he said he and his cousin would ride straight to Tadcaster when the time came. I was to drive myself over with an old clean-legged cart mare, in my dog-cart—she being the only animal that I had fit to go.



CHAPTER III.

“ Ah ! gather your reins and crack your thong,
And bid your steed go faster.”

—O. W. HOLMES.

WHEN the appointed morning arrived—and a fine morning it was—I started in what I considered good time, to drive the ten miles that lay between me and Tadcaster. I hadn't gone far before I caught up a very pretty girl—apparently a gipsy, who was limping along in the same direction, and she at once besought me to give her a ride, as she was very footsore. Her way, it seemed, was the same as mine, and as she was really good-looking, I was glad enough to take her up. She resisted all attempts, however, to draw her into conversation, and after a while I desisted, and lapsed into silence ; not but what I glanced at her fairly often, and wondered a good deal what she could be doing on the tramp through the country all by herself. The cart mare was not speedy, and so we made less progress than I had counted on ; indeed, I

awoke at last to the knowledge that I should probably be late ; so I pulled myself together, thought no more of my companion, and urged the old beast along to the best of my power.

At last we came upon one extremity of Tadcaster Park, and glancing at my watch, I saw that I was already fully a quarter of an hour late. I began to think I should do well to get rid of the gipsy before going any farther ; but when I hinted that I was probably going to drive up to the Hall, and that it would be out of her way, she assured me that if I would take her so far it would enable her to make a short cut to where she wanted to go, and I hadn't strength of mind to say I should prefer not being seen with her. I began to get in a terrible fluster as to what on earth I was to say, and what manner of figure I should cut when I met the rest of the party ; but there seemed no help for it, and I resignedly went on. A bend in the road brought us in full view of the steeplechase course, where Sir John's private trainer was wont, with very indifferent success, to school the horses committed to his charge. It was a capital course, about two miles round, on good spongy turf. All the fences were artificial, and none of them

very formidable ; but there was a fair water jump, with very little water in it, however ; and away on the high ground, half hidden from us by mighty old elm-trees, was the Hall, very striking in its look of stately comfort.

"Only just in time," cried I ; for there was a group of people on the far side of the course, and there were four ladies on horseback, ranged ready for a start. It was too late to drive round to the Hall, and I at once pulled up, determined to see the sport from the road where I was. Of the gipsy, I became utterly oblivious. Just at this moment they were "off," and I soon recognized Lady Janet's chestnut making play at a tremendous pace, and flying yards over the first fence with immense vigour ; the rest pretty well close together. On they went, safely for the present, for the horses were all clever jumpers, and were now coming round towards us. The course on our side passed within fifty yards of the road, and we were standing just opposite the water jump, so we should have a splendid view. Of all the sights I ever saw it was the most extraordinary ; but there was no time to reflect ; they were very near now, and I could see Lady Janet, evidently in the last stage of wild excite-

ment, kicking and shoving her horse along, though she had a good hundred yards lead at the time.

"The woman's a fool," I muttered. "How like a woman to lose her head in that way!"

However, head lost or not, she bore down on the water jump at a terrific pace—for her horse could go, and no mistake about it—and landed over with any amount to spare, though the effort sent her ladyship flying forward in very inartistic fashion. Mrs. Cunningham, I now saw, was coming next, on the same bay horse of Sir John's, and very nicely indeed did she take the jump; while as for the third—oh, of course that's Molly, and Charlie's cousin Kate.

"My word, but she's a neat rider!" exclaimed I, breaking out into speech, for I never saw a girl handle a horse more prettily in my life as she pulled Molly together after that worthy mare had dropped a little short at the water. Last of all went Edith, not half badly either, for having once started, she to some extent gained nerve, but the good Betty was very short of speed.

"Do they go round twice?" asked the gipsy.

"I hope so," said I, scarce noticing her. "Molly'll win it if they do."

For I was morally convinced that Lady Janet couldn't last out four miles.

All right still; and in the same order they keep topping the plain bushed-up fences, with bits of ditches one side or another. Now for the timber, just ordinary hurdles; but the chestnut has got out of hand, and—crash! he gallops clean through them, but doesn't fall, though his rider very nearly does, and recovers herself with difficulty. I wonder if Master Jack admires that exhibition?

Good! they're going round twice. Now we shall see what we shall see. Once more they are approaching us. Lady Janet still leads, but I can see at a glance she is all to pieces. Her hat has flown off, and is hanging behind; the reins are in a huddled confusion in her hand; she is riding on, the curb at one side, the snaffle at the other! she looks fearfully hot, sits very loose and limp, and if I may be pardoned in applying such an expression to one of the sex, is blowing like a grampus. Her horse is a good one, but he is terribly handicapped now, for, in addition to having no assistance at all, he has to endure his rider flopping down on him like a helpless sack after every jump.

Mrs. Cunningham is calm and collected, hasn't turned a hair, in fact ; she would be dangerous, but the bay horse is not very fast, and I know Molly has a turn of speed upon occasion. What a pretty girl that Cousin Kate is ! They have taught her to ride in Ireland, and no mistake. I never thought Edith would have done so well. She's tailed off a good bit, but that's the mare's fault. She'll be last, I suppose, but she's made a better show than the first, up to now ; and Jack Prescott is too good a judge not to see it. Ah ! Molly's going up ! and I see the fair Cousin Kate shoot right up alongside of Lady Janet as they are approaching the third fence after the water. Her excited ladyship flogs and jags at the chestnut with all her remaining strength, though they are fully three-quarters of a mile from the finish, and the good horse being pulled out of his stride, has much ado to blunder safely over the quite insignificant obstacle. His mistress continues to drive him along as if her life depended on it, and Molly is quietly pulled back a length or two. Why, the girl must have been at it before ! I never saw any one take a feeler in a more old-fashioned style. It's a hundred to one on her.

"I'm so glad you think so," said the gipsy—for I

had spoken my last thoughts aloud, and I observed that she was getting quite excited over the struggle ; but I soon forgot her again, for they are rapidly nearing the finish, through the broken-down hurdles, Molly lying very close and handy, Mrs. Cunningham out of it now, and Edith coming gallantly on, though far behind. Now for the last hurdles. Molly draws up again, and the pair fly them almost side by side ; but what a farce of a "set to" afterwards ! Lady Janet in floundering collapse, hair all flying, whip fortunately dropped in her wild efforts to use it (of course without taking it up in a proper fashion), reins partly lost ; for the rest, jerked madly just when the horse is opening out for his stride ; habit flying up, feet kicking vaguely—it may be with intent to use the spur, but, if so, failing utterly. Oh it is a simply ludicrous sight ! While there sits Cousin Kate, still as a mouse, and Molly is striding away as if she liked it immensely. Kate seems to be fairly playing with her antagonist, and encouraging her to make a fool of herself, for it is not till fifty yards from the post that she gives Molly a shake up, and goes in an easy winner by a length. Mrs. Cunningham is a bad third, and Edith, who perseveres to the end, a worse

fourth. Lady Janet is really very bad, and has to be hastened off to the house, but I notice Jack does not go with her.

I was so excited over the performance that I at once set off to drive rapidly to the Hall, forgetting all about the gipsy girl; and it was not till I had got round by the long avenue, and was close on the stables, that I remembered her.

"You don't want to come here?" suggested I.

"Oh, yes, I'll stay a bit and tell the people their fortunes." And before there was time for further parley we came upon the whole party returning from the course. I got out, so did the gipsy, and a groom went off with my trap, while I mumbled greetings and some kind of explanation as to the girl. They smiled somewhat, but she quickly fastened on Rankin, who was rather pleased with her, until she excited laughter by telling him he would never break his neck; but I was taken up with Charlie's cousin Kate, as she walked Molly gently along. I introduced myself as an old friend, congratulated her, and asked where Charlie was.

"Oh, he was obliged to go off with uncle to London last night, quite unexpectedly. He was so disap-

pointed; but he insisted on me coming, and wrote me a letter to bring to Mr. Prescott, explaining. So I just came over with the groom; and I hope they won't think it bad form of me."

"Oh, no; nothing astonishes them here." And I thought what an acquisition Cousin Kate was to our somewhat slow country.

I talked with her of the old time, when I had known her as a little girl, and she seemed quite pleased to have met me again.

But Jack Prescott very soon bore down on us, and proceeded to make himself vastly agreeable. His disillusion so far as Lady Janet was concerned had been complete; but that had not brought him back to his old love, for Katie's performance had fairly bewitched him, and he was evidently ready there and then to give himself up wholly to her. "For," thought he, "there's not another woman in the kingdom can ride like that." Lady Janet had taken herself to her room, either from pique and vexation, or, likely enough, because really she felt ill; and the exertion had been a good deal too much for Edith, who, in fact, fainted dead away when she got into the house.

The gipsy was meanwhile quite a success, and made any amount of money. She hadn't half told all she knew by the time the luncheon-gong sounded. Would she go and have dinner in the servants' hall? No, she didn't want anything. She would sit outside in the summer-house until we came out. Miss D'Aguiar wouldn't take her hat off;—and luncheon proceeded in very ordinary fashion.

Afterwards there was a good deal of casual wandering about the gardens, and Jack appropriated his new fancy so far as he could manage it. But I will not delay the catastrophe. I myself, after no long time, came suddenly round a clump of shrubs on an arbour, the back of which was turned to me. I heard Jack's voice, and in a weak moment I listened. He was speaking in quite an impassioned style, and I just caught the words—

"And I can't help it. Whatever you think of me, I must tell it you; I love you, and I shall never love any one else."

Then there rang out a merry laugh, and a voice very familiar to me broke in—

"Worse luck for you, my boy. *What a d—d fool you are, Jack!*"

"Miss D'Aguilar!" gasped the astounded Jack.

But it had all flashed on me at once, and I ran quickly forward.

"You young scoundrel, Charlie," I cried. "Who would have dreamed of you getting up like this?"—and I pulled off his hat, with which came a fair amount of false hair.

He laughed, as if it was all the best joke in the world; and Jack, after some bewilderment, joined in.

"How on earth did you get up like this?"

"Oh, my Cousin Kate helped me; it's her habit and things I've got on. You couldn't believe how I'm stuffed and padded to make me look all right. She wouldn't ride herself; and besides, I wanted to make a certainty of showing Jack here that Lady Janet Barrington is up to nothing at all when it comes to real business."

"Why should you want to do that?" inquired Jack.

"All for your own good. Edith Hope is worth dozens of her, and for the matter of that, can ride better, though she doesn't go ramming away in the same breakneck way. Now, don't be vexed. You'll say I've been your best friend, some day."

So the matter ended, and Charlie went home after

every one had had a good laugh at him, but no one else knew that he had acted in any other spirit than that of mere fun. I have never in my life seen a more complete deception carried out, for we all knew him more or less, yet no one had for a moment even suspected.

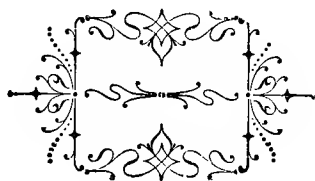
But what of the real Cousin Kate?

She, too, was with us, in the make-up of the gipsy, as Charlie soon announced. She had been very anxious to see the sport, and she and Charlie had hit upon this plan by which she might do so without spoiling it. He knew quite well the way I should be driving, and so she had gone there in time to be caught up.

I drove her back again that night, and so far as she and I are concerned, I may as well say that we somehow or other agreed so well, that we are now a matter-of-fact married couple.

Jack Prescott did his duty, for in addition to having sense to see that he had been acting like a fool, his conscience smote him at the idea that Edith was ill for a long time through the tension of nerves and severe exertion, undergone all to please him, as he well knew. Edith has made him an excellent wife.

He is very fond of her now, and has come to the conclusion that it is a mistake for women to ride hard, for it is only a man's business after all; and though there are ladies that can and do go, yet when it comes to a real good thing, it is firmly impressed on Jack's memory and mind that "a man's a man for a' that."



A MODERN ALCHEMIST.

A MODERN ALCHEMIST.



“OUR fortunes are made ; we are millionaires !”

Thus spoke Mr. Macwhang to his son-in-law, Walter Macnab. “The amount we shall make is simply fabulous !”

“But are you sure it is all right ?” asked Mrs. Macwhang, cautiously.

“Certain ; I have had it analysed, and here you see it clearly stated that it is actually flax. Dufaur’s, nevertheless, say they will pay the price of silk for it, and what a fortune that means for us you may imagine.”

Mr. Macwhang paused here, and indulged for some moments in ecstatic reverie. He was a most worthy gentleman, with whom the world had not dealt very well—that is to say, he had never made a fortune

except to lose it, and the Micawber-like hope of something turning up was his usual habit of mind.

His son-in-law, Walter Macnab, being possessed of a fair competence, had not yet been bitten with the desire of making haste to grow rich—a desire which King Solomon so roundly condemns. Moreover, Walter had only been married a few months, and that to a very charming wife, by name Jenny, so that he could not be expected to give much attention to monetary speculations.

The young couple were living with the father and mother-in-law, for the present, at a very charming place not a hundred miles from Sunbury. Walter had just been called to the Bar, and this profession seemed to be opening very fairly for him.

In these bright, happy days it had happened that Mr. Macwhang encountered a Frenchman named Magner in the City of London. Magner, who was introduced by a very wise man, and was also under the auspices of a certain swarthy colonel, came to him having heard that he was of a speculative frame of mind, and boldly declared himself the inventor of a process by which flax or cotton could be turned into silk! Nay, more, he produced a skein or “hank” of

fine silk, as it appeared, and stated that this was, in fact, flax which had been converted by his process—a process, mark you, so cheap as to render it almost an equivalent to the conversion of base metals into gold.

Mr. Macwhang was, of course, sceptical; but M. Magner left the hank with him, requesting him to have it examined, and to communicate further when that had been done.

The first thing was to have the apparent silk tested by some expert, and accordingly Mr. Macwhang took the hank to a chemist and left it for analysis. The result of this analysis had just reached him, shortly before this story opens.

The hank was stated to be flax, beyond all dispute.

Hence the joy of Mr. Macwhang, in which his family rapidly began to share, as they thought of the wonderful prospect before them. Magner had already been bound by an agreement to content himself with one-third of all profits, the remaining two-thirds to be devoted to Mr. Macwhang, in consideration of his finding the necessary capital.

Mr. Macwhang had journeyed to the spacious establishment of Messrs. Brocklehurst, but being

coldly and suspiciously received there, he went on to Messrs. Dufaur's. Here he had an interview with one of the partners, explained the reason of his coming, and, feeling half ashamed at the folly of the thing, produced the hank, and submitted it for inspection.

"Well, sir," said the courteous Dufaur, "all you say may be quite true, but without contradicting any one or anything, I may tell you that we will give the price of silk for as much of this as you like to supply."

"Walter, my boy," said his father-in-law that evening, after the ladies had gone to bed, "I've been thinking you would do well to be in this as soon as we are quite satisfied that it's all right. We shall want a good deal of money, and I don't think I can manage it all by myself."

So over the whisky it was agreed that Walter should embark jointly in this magnificent speculation.

To make assurance doubly sure, it was arranged next day that Magner should be supplied with the necessary apparatus, on a small scale, at his own house, and should make some silk in the presence of Mr. Macwhang, his son-in-law, and others.

The outlay of some £50 provided all that was necessary for this experiment, and the anxious spe-

culators arrived on the scene early one morning, bringing with them from home various skeins of cotton to undergo the magic process.

Magner was an insignificant-looking little man, yet with a pleasant address. He was, moreover, obviously very well read, and an adept in scientific matters. A ten minutes' conversation with him imparted great confidence as to his integrity. Madame Magnier was very showy, but on the whole quiet.

It would not serve any distinct purpose to describe in detail how the cotton and flax were dealt with; what an elaborate cleansing of them there was at the outset; what steeping in nitric acid; what subsequent rinsing in cold water; what squeezing and drying by centrifugal force; what boiling in water and sulphate of soda in a hermetically sealed digester, heated up to no small pressure; what passing again through cold water, this time mixed with carbonate of ammonia, to be dried yet once more.

Ah, but this was not all, though by this time the spectators were growing fairly bewildered. The important business was only about to commence. Into the tank containing the fabric the little Frenchman now put what he declared to be fifty cubic centi-

metres of dissolved silk, and to the tank he applied a powerful battery for about fifteen minutes. This, it was said, was a similar idea to that of electro-plating, and produced a similar result. But hot water and acetic acid had yet to be poured into the tank, and even soap was added for some mysterious reason. The whole was boiled for thirty minutes longer. The fabric was then taken out, washed thoroughly with soap, rinsed in hot and cold water, squeezed dry, and finally put into an air-pump.

By some subsequent process various beautiful dyes were introduced, and Mr. Macwhang and Walter were at last rewarded for their somewhat weary waiting by receiving what seemed the identical skeins which they had brought, now converted into the most beautiful silk possible.

The thing now seemed to be altogether beyond the region of doubt. There and then agreements were signed with Magner, by which he was to receive money for his temporary wants, and all that was needful for working the invention on a grand scale was to be found. The little Frenchman smiled complacently, and Mr. Macwhang regaled the company with the best lunch to be procured at the Ship and Turtle.

Returning that night, the two embryo millionaires dashed into the drawing-room with triumphant cries, and brandished before the astonished eyes of their wives the silken skeins which they had taken from home in the morning in the guise of humble cotton. It was indeed a revelation.

Next day Mr. Macwhang was occupied in taking out patents and registering trade-marks wherever on the habitable globe such things are practicable. In this he was encouraged by Magner, who expressed great anxiety that his invention should be everywhere protected. For himself his requirements seemed to be very moderate, for when Mr. Macwhang, in the fulness of his heart, asked him whether he should write him a cheque for £500 to be going on with, he replied, "Oh, no, sir, £50 will be quite enough for the present. I am anxious to have money spent on the invention, not on myself."

Walter, meanwhile, accompanied by his wife, was driving about the country to view several places which had been thought of as suitable for the establishment of the works, and they eventually found a very fine large building about a mile from Sunbury, which they thought would serve the purpose admirably. The rent

was £500 a year for the unexpired portion of the lease, with £300 premium. This information gained, it remained but to have Magner down to inspect the place, and so next day he was invited to Mr. Macwhang's abode to view the building in question, and to dine.

He came down, and he expressed himself as delighted with the building. Nothing could be better, he said, and so without more ado it was taken, and the premium paid.

At dinner that night Magner charmed the ladies by his really clever and attractive conversation. Not only had he all that graceful tact which distinguishes Frenchmen of the old school, but his evidently thorough acquaintance not only with Englishmen, but also with the best English authors, had given him a more robust tone, and had, in fact, made him right good company. Mrs. Macnab was especially pleased when he described her French accent as perfect, she having been induced, after somewhat natural hesitation, to sing in that language; and altogether, the idea of doubting the little man and his invention now seemed almost ridiculous.

Next day was spent with Messrs. Pontifex, the

celebrated ironworkers, arranging to have the works put in hand without delay. Very elaborate was the specification of what was required, and very costly were some of the items ; but that mattered not : whatever Magner said was wanted must be had. Would not the worth of it return many millionfold ?

There was necessarily a delay before the works could be completed, and it was arranged that Magner, in the meanwhile, should keep on working at home, so as to provide a sufficient number of samples to lay before the trade. In no long time Mr. Macwhang took him, with one of these samples, to Dufaur's, and there saw the same partner as before. This gentleman now became interested, though he was still sceptical. Yet even he had nothing to say when Magner brought him, on the next day, a hank *half flax and half silk*, having, as he said, put only the one-half through the process.

This seemed, indeed, conclusive, and communications were at once made with the French agents of the establishment, with a view to developing the French patent on a gigantic scale.

One fault, however, was found with the hanks of silk as Magner produced them ; they were always so

entangled that it would not be possible to wind them off, and they were, therefore, not in a suitable state for commercial purposes. Messrs. Dufaur impressed this very strongly on him, and at last gave him one or two perfect and merchantable hanks, to show him exactly what was wanted. Mr. Macwhang, on the other hand, procured for him, from Ireland, several beautiful hanks of the finest flax.

Before sending them to Magner Mr. Macwhang, for some unaccountable reason, measured the length of these. From this time forward a change came over Magner. He began to grumble that he was not receiving money, but he was immediately offered what he wanted ; he made all manner of excuses for delay, and although constantly urged to produce silk as required, he did not do so ; until, having been unusually pressed, he appeared one morning before Mr. Macwhang bearing in his hands a splendid hank which was manifestly all right, and with a triumphant air asked if that would do.

Mr. Macwhang thought it would, but he would take it over to Messrs. Adamson & Co., the nearest silk people, and ask them about it. There he saw a gentleman who, somewhat more plain-spoken than Mr.

Dufaur, assured him that not only was the material in a merchantable state, but that he should not believe it to be other than silk, though Mr. Macwhang averred the same till he was black in the face.

This, of course, pleased Mr. Macwhang hugely, for it convinced him still further of the excellence of the invention.

Returning to the office which he had just left, he sat down and gazed in delight at the hank.

Suddenly, as by an inspiration, it flashed across him that the flax which he had measured was longer than this. A cold dread crept over him : he found a tape, measured the hank, compared it with his memorandum as to the length of the flax which it was supposed to represent. It was *fully six inches shorter!*

"Why," cried he, "I do believe this is one of the very hanks of actual silk which Dufaur gave him to copy from!"

And so it was.

Messrs. Dufaur had the exact measurement of it, and Magner, when taxed with the deceit, confessed that he had been guilty of it, owing to the difficulty which he found in producing his materials in the proper merchantable state, which he had been so

continually pressed to do. He solemnly declared that all the rest of his work was genuine ; and so he and Mr. Macwhang parted that day.

The next day Magner was missing, nor was he ever met with again in England.

Upon this Mr. Macwhang had all the samples of Magner's workmanship submitted to one of the best known analysts, and it was found that they all were silk, and nothing but silk. The original analysis, which had misled our friend and the author of it, was now looked up.

After a good deal of evasion and difficulty, it was discovered that the chemist, instead of himself doing the analysis in question, had entrusted it to a drunken apprentice, whose declaration that the subject matter was flax had so effectually played into Magner's hands ; though this could only be regarded as an unfortunate coincidence, as it was quite certain that the chemist was not an accomplice.

Thus did the visions of vast fortunes vanish and leave behind, not only an aching void of disappointment, but also the unpleasant consciousness of a good many thousands of pounds having been spent in a, to say the least of it, foolish fashion.

Why the man *Magner* procured the expenditure of so much money on patents, works, &c., rather than on himself, no one ever understood. It may be that he had some fancy as to a possibility of succeeding with his alleged invention, if he were once provided with all the machinery he demanded, and that meanwhile he kept up appearances by what must have been simply sleight-of-hand feats—substituting silk for flax and cotton.

What exactly was in the man's mind it is impossible to say. Certain it is that he bolted, leaving *Madame*, who turned out to be not entitled to that appellation, behind him. *Mr. Macwhang* and *Walter* made no stir in the matter for fear of becoming laughing-stocks; and in no long time it was stated in the English papers that *Magner* had got £100,000 from some people in France. These also, it is presumed, he has left.

The absolute truth of this story, the facts of which occurred within the last few years, will serve to show that we are hardly justified in laughing at our ancestors because alchemy was within the range of their belief.



THE THAMES EMBANKMENT.

THE THAMES EMBANKMENT.

THE Editor was seated in the editorial room wearily reading manuscript after manuscript, each one stated by its author to be “peculiarly adapted” for the paper—or something to that effect—whereas, in point of fact, the eternal fitness of things had adapted them to the waste-paper basket alone.

The pile of letters not opened as yet presented an irritating prospect before him, and he paused in his task as if fairly bewildered, and not knowing how to organize his attack on the work of the day.

A knock at the door and a clerk brought in the name of a caller—“Mr. Jones.”

“Who is he—what does he want?”

“Don’t know, sir,” replies the clerk.

"Oh, tell him I can never be seen except by appointment."

And the clerk departed with the message, presently, however, to return with a pencil memorandum.

"I want particularly to see you ; I can tell you one of the strangest stories you ever heard."

"Ask him to come in," said the Editor.

And there stepped into the room a man, wan and pale, with his old coat buttoned up to the throat to hide the absence of a shirt ; every other portion of his attire in the most worn-out state ; a miserable, unkempt-looking fellow, yet with clear-cut features, and a nameless something about him which told of his having seen better days.

"Seems to me," said he, "that you are pretty snug here."

The Editor shows signs of impatience.

"Well, now, what do they give you for editing this paper?"

"Really, sir, I cannot talk on such matters with you ; my time is valuable——"

"Is it? Now, I want to know whether mine is. At least, I know I'm dead broke and dead beat, and I thought if there was any money flying about here

you might give me half a guinea for a story I'll tell you. I wouldn't trouble you, but I'm so ill, and I don't know what to do for the children."

The Editor, although of decorous austerity, had children of his own, and the man coughed so pitifully, and looked so ill, that he put all his papers on one side, and answered,

"I know I may be doing a foolish thing, but there's your half-guinea; now I'll ring for a shorthand writer, and you shall tell your story."

The shorthand writer being summoned, and settled down to work, the man began.

I.

Now, I'm not going to tell you whether this story is true or false. Perhaps I'll let you know as to that another day; but you may take it I am the son of a large landowner in the north of England, and Jones is not my real name. I was educated at Eton and Oxford with my elder brother, and in every way brought up with the same tastes, though he was to have the estate and I was to make my way in the world. In these days of our seeming equality I was

a better-looking fellow than you might think, and as I was a bit more lively than my brother, was somewhat the greater favourite ; and though we were both desperately fond of Maggie Bruce, the vicar's daughter—a charming, simple-minded country maiden—I was tolerably sure that my brother Robin did not rise in any way to my level in her estimation.

Poor Robin, he was an honest-hearted, good fellow, and the girl must have been a fool who couldn't see that my superiority was only superficial ; not that I was a bad sort in those days, only I hadn't much what you might call moral stamina.

So the days wore on, and the vacation-time used to see us in the full swing of country sports and gaieties. People played croquet in those days, and I well remember how I strayed away with Maggie, unobserved, from one of those games along the walks of a grand old-fashioned wilderness of a garden, until we reached a secluded summer-house, facing through a glimpse of trees upon the lake hard by, and beyond that again the eternal hills.

It was about seven o'clock on the sweetest of summer evenings, and the breath of honeysuckle and other flowers was wafted deliciously around, and the

position was one to make older people foolish, let alone a mere boy.

Who cares for lovers' talk or how they lead up to it? None surely but themselves. Suffice it, in no long time my arm was around that dainty waist, the sweet little head was resting half timidly on my shoulder, and I half shyly—as is the way of boys—had ventured to kiss, and then to kiss and kiss again, those lips which seemed formed only to murmur of love for me.

There was a sudden step, and my brother stood before us.

Maggie started, screamed, and ran away. He and I looked one another in the face for a while and said—nothing



II.

WELL, you may call that the first chapter, and the second may begin at the point where Maggie married my brother. Ay, you may look surprised ; but then, you see, he had got the property now, and her people talked her into it ; while I—God help me!—hung back and didn't try to stop it, for I had no mind to marry her myself ; my whole feeling up to then had been more of gratified conceit at the girl loving me than any worthier sensation, and now that same feeling led me to wish still to stand first with her—even with my brother's wife. And she was, after all, a vain, weak woman, quite incapable of appreciating the quiet worth of Robin, and his society grew more and more irksome to her, though he worshipped the very ground on which she stood. He had no sort of suspicion of me now, and I don't think I at first meant any harm, except to have my absurd vanity satisfied by making her say that she still loved me more than any one in

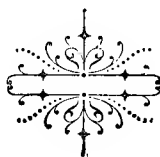
the world. As though a man could bring about such a result, and then get clear of the consequences without further trouble!

No, these smouldering fires once awakened, there was no quenching them; weak though her character may have been, there was no doubt as to the strength of her passion; and I, who had begun as a mere trifler, ended in being also carried away by the position I had myself created, and giving myself up madly to what I deemed love.

Dear old Robin, never suspecting, regarded his wife and me as brother and sister, and there was no fear of him; but we were mad at the bare idea of restraint, and though neither had mentioned it as yet, we each felt that there must come an escape from it, and it came in this wise.

It was a hunting day, and we had had a rare run with the York and Ainsty, in the time when Colonel Fairfax—rest his soul!—was master, and showed such splendid sport; and Maggie could ride more than a bit. On a splendid chestnut she had shown most of us the way, and I thought myself fortunate to be within hail of her when the hounds ran into their fox not far from Sessay Wood, and there was but the

Colonel and another there to perform the necessary obsequies. After waiting awhile we rode slowly away, just to keep the horses warm, as we thought, and not very much relishing the idea of drawing Sessay Wood with all its oceans of mud ; and slowly still away. Suddenly our eyes met with a meaning each understood, and I whispered, "Let us go to York, there catch the three o'clock express, and so to town."



III.

AND there, sir, is the end of the second chapter, for we went, thinking nothing of the nuisance of horses and no luggage. We went, and I have scarcely known a happy moment since. Perhaps it was the trouble in getting comfortable quarters at first that put us out of humour, and then the constant fear of being followed by Robin. He never moved in the matter at all, poor fellow, though it broke his heart; and then the old story of poverty driving out love, for you know I was poor enough, and so took to betting and gambling to try and make things square. Don't think I'm blaming betting and gambling, sir. I did that deliberately and with my eyes open, and I lost—that was all. It's a strange thing, but men always do lose when it is of vital importance for them to win. I got cleaned out at Monte Carlo, where we went, and with great difficulty borrowed enough to come home with, and then I commenced cheating at cards. I did

this fairly well, and things began to look up. Maggie seemed happy again, and life might have grown rosier, but one day I was found out and kicked out.

After that the descent was rapid. I never had much principle about me, so how could it be otherwise? I acted as the jackal for one or two Jews, to whom I managed to introduce young fools who knew me by name only, and who wanted to borrow money.

Thus I earned pitiful commissions. This game was soon played out, and I worked the changes on all manner of business, from being an advertising canvasser to being a card-sharper. At the former I might have succeeded, but one day when I had got an order for an advertisement to be inserted six times, I put a two before the six and made it read twenty-six, drawing the commission for the whole lot. That settled me as soon as it was discovered.

Maggie, all this while, had remained with me, that is all I can say. Something of the old attachment must have kept her there, but you know, sir, what a weak woman is under trouble and temptation. They think—perhaps more than we do—that the drink drives away care, and for the rest—ah, well, I shut my eyes to it, and I am ashamed to say profited.

Finally, I got in with the lowest scum of the great city—those men who, alike on the racecourse or elsewhere, are wholly without regard to person or property, and many is the ramping enterprise in which I have been engaged. Recollect, sir, I haven't told you this is a true story, but times were desperately bad all the same, and something must be done to keep the wolf from the door.

One night I met some of my companions in a house in Kate's Court, not far from the Ratcliff Highway, to plan some further action. There were only two of them present, and one of these, Jim Jarley by name, said to me forthwith, "Look here, mate, here's a new game. The Thames Embankment has never much stir on it o' nights, and we can easy collar any amount of dibs once we can get the right sort of gent to come there. Now, your missus is a good-looking wench. You tell her to go up there in the Strand, and when she sees a rich-looking party, take him for a walk like on the Embankment, and then we can meet him pleasant and comfortable."

I had, perhaps, a slight sensation of repugnance to this proposal at first, but not much, and agreed with Jim and the other man, Jabez Orpwood, to arrange

matters according to this suggestion for the next night. So we parted.

Maggie took very little persuading to do what we wished, but I told her we only wanted to get gentlemen on for card-sharpping and so forth, not mentioning the idea of robbery; and so the next night we took up our position somewhere between the Temple and Waterloo Bridge, and walked up and down to wile away the time. Something like a creepy shiver kept coming over me. The black look of the water, and the dark starless sky, seemed to touch some strange chord of feeling in me, I know not why; and the countless lights of the great city seemed almost like eyes of some long-forgotten conscience gazing at me and into me.

Jarley and Orpwood were in good spirits, and laughed and chatted gaily, poking jests at me for my apparent melancholy.

"Do believe he's jealous of his missus being on at this game," said Jarley.

"Hush," muttered Orpwood, "she's coming with some one."

She was coming, sure enough, and my heart sank within me as we walked to meet them near the breast-

work of the Embankment. Her companion was a man of middle height—about my own size—much wrapped up in a voluminous coat, and with a comforter covering his mouth.

“Gent with a cold,” whispered Jarley. “It’ll do him good to warm him up a bit.”

So on they came, and we were ready—Jarley to spring on the man as soon as he was past, I and Orpwood to rifle his pockets. We purposely met them where there was least light, and scarcely a soul near; they passed, and I thought the man looked hard at me, but there was an agony almost of nervousness about me now, and I scarcely remember the rest as I should do.

Certain it is, that Jarley made good his grip on the unfortunate man’s throat; certain it is that I and Orpwood seized his watch and a large quantity of money; and then, as he struggled powerfully, he managed to half escape, and called loudly for the police. How it happened I know not, but we all closed with him on this, and in desperation—for he was making a frightful noise—we raised him up, and shoved him over the Embankment wall.

Just as he was overcome and helplessly falling, he

fixed his eyes on Maggie, and shouted in a voice I can never forget—"Wife, my wife! O God! what have you done?"

And Maggie fainted dead away—he had recognized her from the first, no doubt—but I looked down into the river, and saw him struggling there, with his white face turned up towards me, and I jumped slap in after him.

I am no great swimmer, sir; and he, poor fellow, couldn't swim at all. But I got a hold of him and supported him.

"Robin, Robin," I gasped; "we didn't know it was you."

"Thank God for that!" he whispered.

And then we were silent, for the tide rushed us swiftly along, and I was fighting—fighting for his life and mine.

A curse, a thousand curses on the cruel jolterheads who made that Embankment, and hung no chains or ropes from it for saving life! It is an outrage on humanity that such things should be, when by a small expense the cause of humanity may be served.

How often did I face that deadly wall and try to make good some sort of hold on it! How I hoped

and hoped, as I was carried along it by the tide, to find something to grasp. It was useless: the remorseless stone ever faced me and ever threw me back, and I sank I know not how many times with my brother. I shouted for help with all my strength, but my voice seemed lost, and the end seemed too surely coming.

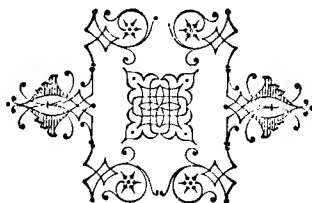
"Robin," I said, "I don't think we can get out of this. I want to tell you I'm sorry for all I've done, and to ask pardon."

"I forgive you, Jack, as I hope to be forgiven. God bless you!" he murmured, with difficulty, and then suddenly threw himself from his hold on me, and I saw him no more.

I was half inclined to give up now in very bitterness of grief; but self-preservation is a strong instinct, and I could swim better now that poor Robin was gone. There was a light in the river some distance below, and I paddled out away from the Embankment, and managed to drift towards it. It turned out to be a boat in which some men were rowing up stream, for some purpose best known to themselves. They pulled me on board half dead, and I have tried to live an honest life since. But do, sir, show up the accursed

danger of that Thames Embankment. Now, sir, I must say good bye. Maggie's outside waiting for me, poor thing; and as you don't look the sort to give one in charge, I don't mind telling you this story is every word true. Good bye, sir, and curse the want of chains on the Thames Embankment!

The Editor was left musing, but very soon decided to publish the story, and also to curse the want of chains on the Thames Embankment.



THE SPORT OF RACING.

THE SPORT OF RACING,

OR,

THE HORSE AND THE VICAR.



I.

I WOULD fain hope that the doings which I, the Rev. Joseph Slapkins, have in times past committed to paper have not been wholly forgotten. There are some, at least, who will remember how my unfortunate possession of the hunter, Rakeaway, led to my participating in a fox chase, and my subsequent suspension from my living. Later I have recorded how, thanks to the kindly interest of Lord Never-sham, I obtained the living of Kirby in Yorkshire, and how by evil chance I was led to adopt shooting as an amusement, which terminated in my suffering painful annoyance through the escapades of a pointer hound named Don, and eventually shooting my bene-

factor by accident, and setting fire, also by accident, to his ancestral hall.

For long after this I was quiet, ministering only to the spiritual necessities of my parishioners, and attempting, so far as in me lay, to forget the abandoned revelry of the past.

But in an evil day I went to York at a time when Mr. Walker was holding an auction sale of horses, and a spice of the old Adam, still lingering in me, led me to pause for a while and watch.

Clad in a sable longcloth coat, with wide felt hat and scrupulously clerical aspect, perhaps I looked a little out of place among the company there assembled ; but after all it was my duty to observe all phases of life, so I stayed.

Many and various horses were put up and sold, nor could I easily repress an occasional inclination to join in the bidding. At last, what was described as a thoroughbred brood mare was led into the ring. She was not comely to look on, and I wondered how such a heavy animal could ever be related to the sprightly taper-limbed creatures which I had heard of and seen in pictures. A gentleman who stood near observed that I viewed the mare with some interest.

"Splendid mare, sir," said he.

"Is she, indeed?"

"Yes, sir, she is that, and her foal will be worth any money, bred, as it will be, by Sophocles out of Flying Scud—Flying Scud's the mare's name, as you'll see. Oh, she's a rare sort, quite likely to breed a Derby winner."

Meanwhile the bidding for Flying Scud was hanging fire terribly.

"Will no one put her in at five and twenty?" asked Mr. Walker. "Twenty—fifteen—ten? Come, she is to be sold; will no one give ten guineas for Flying Scud?"

"Give her a start," said the man who had been speaking to me, "give her a start; she ought to fetch a thousand. And in an evil moment I blurted out the word "ten."

"Thank you, sir," said Mr. Walker; "we like to see gentlemen of your cloth taking an interest in horses. Ten guineas only is bid for Flying Scud. No advance on ten guineas? At ten guineas only going—going—going—gone! The Rev. Joseph Slapkins."

I stood like one in a dream; I looked wildly

around for the man who had incited me to this heinous act. He was gone! There was I, left the possessor of a brood mare, which, I had reason to believe, was expected to produce offspring for purposes of racing. Once more I felt that I was embarking on my evil career of sport—but I was in the hands of Fate, and therefore I accepted the services of a man of unclean aspect, and suffered him to arrange for the transport of Flying Scud to Kirby.



II.

I ARRIVED at Kirby, accompanied by the man and the mare, and I hastened on to tell my wife what had befallen me. Never shall I forget her look of horror when I revealed the truth to her.

“Oh, Joseph,” she cried, “this creature will be the ruin of you. I know you will be allured into taking it to race meetings. Who knows but you may yourself ride it in a race, as you did Rakeaway in that awful fox run? Who knows but you may bet, and lapse into all manner of wickedness?”

I assured her that the animal was unsuited for racing purposes, and besought her to aid me in arranging where it might be bestowed. After much lamentation she condescended to suggest that Flying Scud might share the repose of the cow-house with our aged and well-beloved cow. This was settled, and the man Abraham who had now arrived with the mare, was deputed to show her to her new

quarters. Abraham assured me that Flying Scud would require constant attendance, and I felt constrained accordingly to engage him. From the first he exhibited wonderful solicitude for the beast, and was for ever ordering large quantities of oats and other delicacies for her. He spent much of his time in rumination at the public house, but he assured me that the mare needed a great deal of thinking about.

The conduct of Flying Scud to the cow, Jemima, was exceedingly reprehensible, for she habitually pursued the unfortunate creature about the field, and when I brought out my old hunting whip and tried to crack it and awe her into better behaviour, I not only lashed myself in the eye, but the mare also lashed out, and I found myself within measurable distance of her hoofs.

One morning Abraham came in to say that Flying Scud had got a colt foal, and I could not repress a feeling of intense excitement at the news. For weeks past I had been studying the Stud Book which I had surreptitiously purchased, and I constantly viewed with growing interest a tabulated pedigree of the mare and her coming son. The demon of sport got a strong hold on me, and I ran rapidly to the cow-

house to see the new arrival. Entering in some haste, I was horrified to find the hitherto placid Flying Scud making at me open-mouthed. I turned and fled, but not before she had caught the skirt of my superfine clerical coat and rent it from me. What else might have happened I know not, but just then Abraham came up, pacified the mare, and I ventured to return and look at the foal. It was an ugly little beast enough; but Abraham said it was a first-rate one, and I was satisfied.



III.

TIME wore on, and the small beast grew apace. It became a centre of attraction to the young men of the district, and there were frequent levees in my field or around my cow-house. I was urged to do all manner of things with it, but I decided to take the advice of Lord Neversham, which was to get rid of it by selling it as a yearling at Doncaster. I had from an early period convinced myself that the foal was possessed of speed, for many a time and oft had I chased it about the field, rattling my hat in order to create excitement, and I had observed that it was invariably able to outstrip its dam. Therefore when the time arrived I decided to enter it in the Derby. After this came the time when Abraham had to take the young thing for sale at Doncaster. He had fatted it up famously, and I made no doubt about receiving a very large price. My wife and I bade adieu to the yearling with feelings of some sorrow; we entertained

no animosity towards it, it was of a gentle and lovable disposition, and we wished it well.

Three days passed, and, alas! the message came that the journey to Doncaster had been unsuccessful—the colt was unsold! Horror of horrors! it was on its way back to us, accompanied by Abraham.

There was no help for it; the yearling returned once more.

“I knew it would,” querulously cried my wife “We shall be eaten out of house and home by the useless beast.”

It was found necessary to partition off our field now, so as to separate the animals, and this added to the expense of maintaining the stock in a manner suitable to their condition and breeding. A writer for the *Dawning Post* had been kind enough to offer to give me his opinion of the yearling once when he was in the neighbourhood; but inasmuch as he took Flying Scud for the yearling and declared her to be of extraordinary promise, I could hardly think that his opinion was of great value.

All this while, however, the colt, which I had named “Flying Childers” after his paternal ancestor, grew and flourished, and one day a trainer came to

see me, and solicited the honour of training for me. I recoiled in horror at the idea, but the man explained that Flying Childers could run in his name, that he would give me half the stakes won, and charge me no expenses. The arrangement seemed highly reasonable, and I acceded to the terms, not, however, without a pious shudder at the thought of being associated in any shape or form with the race-course. I did not venture even to tell my wife about it.

So time passed on, and I often walked up to the training-ground hard by to see Flying Childers, until one day the trainer, Jim Brown, treated me to the sight of what he called "a rough up" among his lot, and, to my joy, I observed Flying Childers galloping away in front of them all like a hare before a pack of terriers.

"That's good enough," said Brown to me, as we stood together watching the exhilarating sight in the clear, crisp morning air. "Now, sir, come in to breakfast."

I have not space to dwell at any length on the subsequent doings of Flying Childers. Suffice it that being by degrees drawn into the vortex of vice, I

imparted sums of money to Brown for the purpose of betting when the horse ran from time to time, and I found that this plan worked admirably, for it not unfrequently happened that Flying Childers was not victorious, albeit many other people had backed him for very large sums ; but on such occasions I always found that Brown had adventured nothing of my stake. When the horse won I won, and that was on many important occasions.

Many unpleasant things were said in the papers about the manner in which the horse ran. It was urged that his feats were of a contradictory character, and nasty imputations were cast upon Brown. He was even summoned before the stewards of the Jockey Club, and cautioned as to his future conduct, while it was added that inasmuch as it was supposed some one else was interested in the horse, that person had better be exceedingly careful also.

Flying Childers was made the favourite for the Derby, and he remained in that position throughout the winter. Brown, however, told me he would wait until nearer the day before backing him, and I asked no more questions. Some weeks before the race he was not so prominent in the betting, and rumours

were put about that all was not well with him. A particularly malicious paragraph appeared in one of the Society papers to the effect that a gentleman in black was reported to have control over Flying Childers, and that if beaten it would be because the colt was priest-ridden.

To cut a long story short, Flying Childers did not come anywhere near winning the Derby, but he won the Epsom Grand Prize next day, beating the second in the Derby in a canter.

To my horror I found that having been entered for the Derby by me, he had run in my name, and I, even I, Joseph Slapkins, was summoned before the Jockey Club, where I could not deny that Brown had won for me much money over the Grand Prize. I became confused and hopelessly perturbed, and as a result I was branded with infamy by being warned off the turf. The affair was much commented on in the papers, and once more had I the unutterable sorrow of grieving terribly my dear wife. I was deprived of my benefice, yet there was one poor consolation in my trouble: one way and another I had cleared some fifty thousand pounds by my turf career, and some person was found who gave ten thousand guineas for Chil-

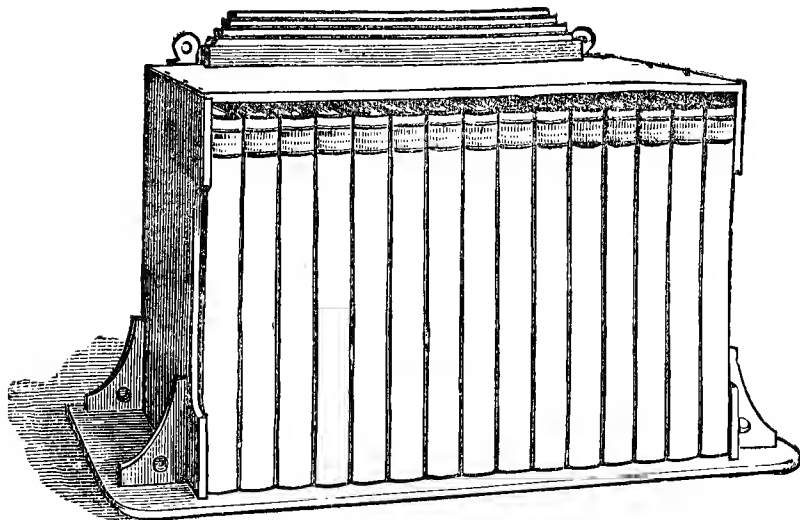
ders, it being understood that the rules of racing, which clearly disqualified him, would not operate in his case, seeing that his purchaser was an important person.

On the whole my racing adventures, though in a way disastrous, were not wholly objectionable.



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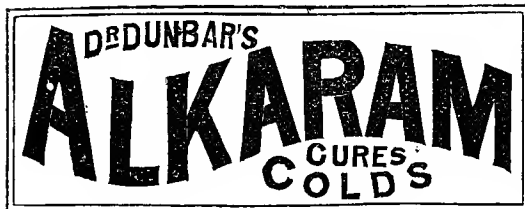
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